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Coleridge, Henry James.

Chapters on the parables of our Lord.

CHURCHES ON THE LUMAS

Lawrence Bryne,

CHAPTERS ON THE PARABLES

E. Elmer Re

Dundalk

QUARTERLY SERIES VOLUME SEVENTY-ONE

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CHAPTERS ON THE PARABLES OF OUR LORD

BY

HENRY JAMES COLERIDGE

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS



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NOTICE.

THE chapters contained in this volume are reprinted—
with a few occasional connecting paragraphs—from various volumes of the *Public Life of our Lord*. The Parables are of course arranged in the order of time, which, though often necessary to a complete understanding of their teaching, has been too often neglected in collections of this kind. The care of passing the volume through the Press has been undertaken, in the illness of the Author, by a kind friend. The Introductory Essay on the Theology of the Parables, is taken from the first volume of the *Life of our Life*, now out of print.

H. J. C.

Torquay,
Feast of St. Luke Evangelist, 1889.

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ESSAY.

ON THE THEOLOGY OF THE PARABLES.

FEW things are more definitely marked off by the sacred historians of the life of our Blessed Lord than the beginning of His teaching by means of parables. It was something which the Apostles did not expect, and as to which they questioned Him at the time. He gave them a distinct and precise answer as to His reason for adopting a new practice in His teaching, which answer has been recorded for our guidance. From this answer, and from an examination of the parables themselves, we may expect to obtain a clue as to any particular characteristics of the teaching in question which furnished the motive for the change of method adopted by our Lord. And we may, at the same time, be able to settle the question which naturally arises concerning the parables—the question, namely, whether they form a distinct body of teaching with reference to a particular subject, or whether the difference between them and the rest of our Lord's instructions was simply one of form.

With regard to this last question, it is pertinent to observe that the parabolic form of teaching was not now used by our Blessed Lord for the first time, unless we are disposed to insist very strictly upon characteristics which may seem almost technical, such as some direct declaration of our Lord that He taught by comparison. When our Blessed Lord said to Simon the Pharisee, as St. Mary Magdalene was kneeling at His feet, "A certain man had two debtors ; one owed him five hundred pence and the other fifty, and when they had nothing to pay he forgave them both,"¹ it can hardly be questioned that He spoke a parable in the common sense of the word, as much as when He said to the priests and scribes at Jerusalem : "What think you ? A certain man had two sons, and going

¹ St. Luke vii. 40, seq.

to the first he said, Son, go to-day and work in my vineyard. And he answered, I will not, and afterwards repented and went. And going to the other he said likewise. And he answered, I go, sir, and went not.”² The two passages are almost exactly parallel, each terminating in a question put by our Lord to the person or persons whom He wished to instruct. But the first case took place before the teaching by parables began, and the last case occurred at the very end of our Lord’s Ministry. In the earlier teaching of our Lord, we find, from the very beginning, that use of images and similitudes which is the foundation of the parabolic system. There are certain passages which we may almost speak of as formal parables, such as the words about the lands already white unto harvest, the sower and reaper being different and yet rejoicing together, addressed to the disciples after our Lord’s conversation with the woman at the well of Samaria,³ and more than one part of the Sermons on the Mount and on the Plain, such as the address to the disciples as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, the images of the father giving his children bread and fish rather than stones or serpents, of the wolves in sheep’s clothing, of the beam and mote in the eye, of the blind leading the blind, of the trees known by their fruit, and the almost direct parable at the end of each of these two sermons of the man who built his house on the rock and the other man who built his house upon the sand.⁴

Passing on a little further in the Gospels, we have the image of the house divided against itself, and of the strong armed man whose goods are made spoil of by a stronger than he.⁵ All these passages are placed at an earlier stage of our Lord’s Ministry than the formal commencement of His teaching by parables, and they make it appear improbable that the great difference between our Lord’s teaching as addressed to the people before and after that commencement is to be found simply, or even principally, in the form which it assumed in its several stages respectively. If a modern teacher, who had up to a certain time been accustomed to direct dogmatic or moral instruction, were suddenly to change his method of

² St. Matt. xxi. 28—32; § 135.

³ St. John iv. 35.

⁴ St. Matt. v. vi. vii. 24—27; St. Luke vi. 20—49; §§ 31—36, 47—49.

⁵ St. Matt. xii.; St. Mark iii.; § 56.

procedure, and teach only by fable or allegory what he had before taught in another way, the difference would be described as consisting mainly in the form. If a teacher, who had before very frequently used familiar images and similitudes, or even anecdotes, to inculcate moral truths, were to abandon any other method and throw his similitudes more strictly into the form of parables, such a change might perhaps arrest attention and cause inquiry, but it would hardly claim the great importance which appears to be attached to the change made by our Lord in the present instance.

We are thus prepared for a further inquiry into the answers given by our Blessed Lord to the questions of the Apostles, and into the parables themselves, as far as these may shed light upon the precise nature of this new phase in our Lord's teaching. Our Lord's answer to the question, "Why dost Thou speak unto them in parables?" is placed by St. Matthew immediately after the first parable, that of the Sower and the Seed.⁶ It contains much that is repeated by St. Mark (iv. 10) when he gives the explanation of that first parable, in answer to a question as to its meaning which must not be confounded with the more general question as to the reasons for the parabolic teaching as such. Leaving aside some apparent difficulties of interpretation, with which it is not at present our business to deal, we may state the answer much in this way—"To those to whom I thus speak it is not given, as it is given to you, to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God. For he that hath, to him shall be given, and he shall abound; but he that hath not, from him shall be taken away that which he hath." The mystery of the Kingdom of God, therefore, is the subject of the parables, and it is in some sense an advance upon and an addition to the knowledge already possessed by the Apostles. "I speak to them in parables," our Blessed Lord continues, "because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaias, who saith: With the hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For the heart of this people is grown gross, and with their ears they have been dull of hearing, and their eyes they have shut, lest at any time they should see

⁶ St. Matt. xiii. 10, seq.; § 59.

with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." This is the reason given by our Lord for His speaking to the multitude in parables. Their hearts are too hard for the mystery of God's Kingdom. He is acting on His own precept, given in the Sermon on the Mount, about not casting pearls before swine, "lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turning upon you they tear you."⁷

But, on the other hand, the parables contained, to those who could understand them, something exceedingly precious. They were, to use the heathen poet's words, full of speech to those who could understand them, and the doctrine which they contained was enshrined in them in that particular form, in order that "to him that hath" more "might be given." Thus our Lord continues to His Apostles—"Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears because they hear. For, Amen, I say to you, many prophets and just men have desired to see the things that you see, and have not seen them, and to hear the things that you hear, and have not heard them." And we find Him showing a kind of tender anxiety for them, lest they should not profit sufficiently by this teaching of "the mystery of the Kingdom of God." Thus, before expounding the Parable of the Seed, He says, "Are you ignorant of this parable? and how shall you know all parables?"⁸ as if they were to contain a body of instruction given in a definite number of comparisons. And again, after the explanation, "Take heed what you hear. In what measure you shall mete it shall be measured unto you again, and more shall be given you. For he that hath to him shall be given, and he that hath not that also which he hath shall be taken away from him."⁹ All these passages seem to prepare us for the conclusion that the parables do not differ merely in form from other instructions of our Lord to the people, such as the Sermon on the Mount, and, in part, the Sermon on the Plain, but that there may be some general subject more particularly set forth in them, to be instructed concerning which was a great and high privilege, of which careless persons were not worthy, and of which the full revelation had hitherto been reserved by God's Providence.

⁷ St. Matt. vii. 6.

⁸ St. Mark iv. 13.

⁹ St. Mark iv. 24, 25.

It might seem, also, that this knowledge was especially required for those who, like the Apostles, were not only to be the subjects of the new Kingdom, but also its ministers and propagators. After the first series of parables, He turned to them and asked, "Have ye understood all these things? They say to Him, Yes. He said unto them, Therefore every scribe instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure new things and old."¹⁰

What, then, is this head or subject of Divine teaching and knowledge which is set forth so specially in the parables, if we are to consider them as differing from former teaching of our Lord, not only in form, but, to a certain extent, in subject and scope? If we consider the moral or practical truths which are undoubtedly conveyed in the parables, we may well be disposed to class them under different heads, and to find a great variety of subjects treated of in them. A recent author, whose work,¹¹ though cast in a very simple and popular form, shows much study and thoughtfulness, has thus classed the parables under four heads:—1. Parables concerning the Church. 2. Parables concerning God's dealing with us. 3. Parables concerning our conduct to God. 4. Parables concerning our conduct to other men. Such divisions are of much practical use; but they are to a great extent arbitrary. In the work to which we allude, for instance, the Parables of the Friend at Midnight and the Unjust Judge fall under the third head—parables concerning our conduct to God; and that of the Good Samaritan under the head of our conduct to other men. But the two former are most certainly meant to encourage us to prayer by setting forth God's way of yielding to it under two images of successful importunity, and that of the Good Samaritan must with equal certainty be assigned to the class of those which set forth God's dealings with us in the work of our redemption after the Fall, and this charity of God to us is made the pattern of our charity to others. We need not discuss other methods of division which may have been suggested, and which have very often much practical usefulness to recommend them. A very interesting arrangement of the parables will be found in the last chapter (ch. xlii.) of Salmeron's volume of Com-

¹⁰ St. Matt. xiii. 51, 52.

¹¹ *The New Testament Narrative, &c.* Burns and Oates, 1868.

mentary on them—the seventh volume of his great work. In this arrangement the parables are adapted to the Gospels for the several days of Lent, in order, from Ash Wednesday up to Easter Tuesday, and the adaptation will be found to suggest many striking reflections. It is, however, as an adaptation, not as a systematic arrangement, that we mention it here.

We believe that it will be found easier to grasp the main idea of the parables as a whole, if we consider that they are meant to illustrate one great head of doctrine which is most naturally fitted for promulgation under this particular form. The parables differ, of course, from the other teaching of our Lord in their descriptive character, the lesson being left to be gathered from the truths involved in the description. And that which is the subject of description, that one great head to which the parables refer, is that which forms only one of the heads in the division lately mentioned—that is, God in His dealings with His creatures, and especially man. Before proceeding to the actual proof of this, with reference to the parables, we may say a few words on the degree to which, if we may be allowed the expression, the thought of the government of the world by God seems to have drawn to itself the tenderest devotion and most constant attention of the Sacred Heart of the Incarnate Son.

It is said of Him in the very outset of the Gospel history, “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Moses gave a rule of action, Jesus Christ brought grace to enable men to keep the law of God; but He brought not only grace, but truth, knowledge which had not been before given concerning His Father—“God no man hath ever seen, the only-begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”¹² The English word “declare” in its present sense, is but a poor substitute for the full meaning of the Greek, or of the Latin word by which the Vulgate has rendered the Greek. St. John seems to mean a full and perfect revelation, as far as such revelation is possible to our capacities. At the very end of His last most intimate discourse to His Apostles, our Lord spoke of the same subject as the great matter of His instructions. “The hour cometh

¹² St. John i. 18. The Greek word is ἐξηγήσατο. The Latin is enarravit.

when I shall no longer speak to you in proverbs, but shall tell you openly of the Father.”¹³ It is well known that St. John throughout uses the word which is rendered “proverbs” in the same sense as the “parables” of the other Evangelists. From the first recorded words of our Lord down to the last, from the speech to our Blessed Lady in the Temple, “How is it that ye sought Me, did ye not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” to the cry on the Cross in which He breathed out His Soul, “Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit,” we can find very few utterances of our Lord which do not directly or indirectly refer to His Father. The particular subject of which we are speaking—that is the Providential dealings of God with men and with His creatures—is characteristically prominent in the earlier teaching of our Lord. To some extent it was less directly mentioned as time went on and as opposition grew.

We may illustrate what we mean by a comparison of the two great discourses, the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain. They were delivered, perhaps, at no very great interval of time. The choice of the twelve Apostles which was immediately followed by the delivery of the second sermon, may probably have taken place about the Pentecost after the second Passover of our Lord’s Ministry; and the Sermon on the Mount, the first of the two, may have been delivered late in the first year. But between the two had sprung up the first formal and organized opposition to our Lord on the part of the Jewish authorities, first at Jerusalem, and afterwards in Galilee, on account of what they deemed His laxity about the Sabbath-day, on which day He had healed the impotent man at the Pool, defended the disciples for plucking the ears of corn, and worked a second miracle—probably after His return from Jerusalem to Galilee—on the man with the withered hand in the synagogue.¹⁴ It was after this that our Lord began to withdraw Himself from His enemies in a manner which St. Matthew has specially mentioned as one of the chain of fulfilments of

¹³ St. John xvi. 25.

¹⁴ St. John v.; St. Matt. xii. 1—8; St. Mark ii. 23—28; St. Luke vi. 1—5; and St. Matt. xii. 9—14; St. Mark iii. 1—6; St. Luke vi. 6—11; §§ 41—44.

prophecy to which he draws attention all through his Gospel.¹⁵ We need not draw out the similarity or the differences which mark the two Sermons further than is useful for our present purpose ; but there is in the second a marked absence of that free loving mention of God as our Father which characterizes the Sermon on the Mount. Most of the Beatitudes are wanting in the later discourse ; as also the injunction to "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven." The very words "your Father" occur only once in the Sermon on the Plain, and then in a passage parallel to a part of the Sermon on the Mount, in which the reference to God's dealings is expanded by a two-fold and beautiful illustration. In St. Luke it is only, "Love ye your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing thereby, and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the sons of the Highest, for He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil."¹⁶ In the Sermon on the Mount the image is far more definite. "I say to you, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you, that you may be the children of your Father Who is in Heaven, Who maketh His sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust."¹⁷ In the part of the Sermon on the Mount which follows, the mention of "your Father in Heaven" meets us in almost every verse. Almsgiving is to be done in secret, that our Father Who seeth in secret may repay it. Prayer is to be made in secret, for the same reason. The "Our Father" is given in full, but it is omitted in the Sermon on the Plain, and the petition about forgiveness is explained by reference to the rules by which our Father will be guided in dealing with us. Then follow precepts about fasting, the motive of which is the same reference to the Father. Then there are passages about not serving two masters, about absolute confidence in our Father, Who knoweth all our needs, Who feeds the birds of the air, and clothes the lilies of the field, and about expecting an answer to prayer, because our Father will certainly give good things to those who ask Him more readily than any earthly father to his own children. In fact, in mentioning the passages of this kind

¹⁵ St. Matt. xii. 17—19

¹⁶ St. Luke vi. 35.

¹⁷ St. Matt. v. 44, 45.

which are to be found in the first Sermon, and which are omitted in the second, we have gone a good way towards a perfect enumeration of the differences between the two discourses.¹⁸ We are far from saying that no other reason than that which is here suggested occasioned these differences, for the audience to which the Sermon on the Plain was addressed, seem to have been made up of a mixed crowd, among whom there may have been some heathen, and the Sermon on the Mount was delivered to those who were more nearly followers of our Lord. But we think that there is good reason for maintaining that the progress of opposition had much to do with the more reserved character of our Lord's teaching at the later period of the two.

But after the Sermon on the Plain had been delivered, a further development of the malignant opposition to our Lord had taken place, very different in character from the captious objection made against Him from the letter of the law about the Sabbath-day. His enemies now take the line of attributing His miracles to a compact with Beelzebub; thus making themselves guilty of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and imputing to Satan that very providential agency of love and mercy which was designed by God to be the remedy for mankind through the Incarnation. We know our Lord's indignation at this charge, and the very strange language He used concerning it. It is from this time that we have to date His denunciations of that evil generation, of which the latter state was to be made worse than the first. And it is from this time also that we are to date the beginning to teach by parables.

There is certainly abundant ground for considering that our Blessed Lord, to speak of Him after a human manner, felt

¹⁸ We may add another illustration, which may at first sight seem to refer to a merely accidental difference. On the first occasion when our Lord cast the buyers and sellers out of the Temple, St. John tells us that He said to them who sold doves, "Take these things away, and make not the house of My Father a house of traffic" (St. John ii. 16). On the second occasion, after Palm Sunday, and therefore at the end of His teaching, He is described by the other three Evangelists as saying more formally, "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves" (St. Matt. xxi. 13; St. Luke xix. 46). St. Mark's words are slightly different (xi. 17).

Himself full of knowledge concerning God and His ways with His creatures, which He burned to impart to those to whom He was sent, but which they were not fit to receive. At the outset of His history we have an account of His conversation with Nicodemus,¹⁹ to whom He spoke about the necessity of a new birth in Baptism with a plainness and openness which are surprising to us when we compare them with many parts of His subsequent teaching. There is the same directness of instruction to be remarked in the conversation which follows, in St. John, between our Lord and the woman of Samaria. When He said to her about the Messias, "I Who speak unto thee am He,"²⁰ He made a direct assertion which He made at no other time, except when adjured by Caiaphas to declare whether He were the Christ, the Son of the Blessed. But to Nicodemus He used words of complaint, as if He were surprised at the dulness of his perception of spiritual truth—"Amen, amen, I say to you, that we speak what we know and we testify what we have seen, and you receive not our testimony. I have spoken unto you earthly things, and you believe not, how will you believe if I shall speak unto you heavenly things?"²¹ We need not draw out here the whole that might be said concerning this difficulty, which our Lord experienced almost universally, and to the very end of His Ministry, in meeting with hearts and minds capable of receiving His Divine doctrine. But these considerations prepare us to find that, when the time had come for Him to teach the people more fully about God, and especially about that great revelation of Himself which is contained in His Providence and in the arrangement of His Kingdom, in the widest sense of that word, He found Himself constrained to adopt this particular mode of teaching more exclusively, by means of which the mystery of the Kingdom might be enshrined in the most familiar form, a form which can hardly escape the memory after that faculty has once taken it in, and yet be so enshrined therein as not to be thrust upon the notice of those incapable of understanding it, while at the same time it invited the thoughtful pondering of those whose hearts were already to some extent enlightened concerning it. If we might be so bold as to compare what passed in our Lord's Sacred Heart with

¹⁹ St. John iii. 1, seq.

²⁰ St. John iv. 26.

²¹ St. John iii. 11, 12.

what is noblest and best in the workings and productions of the most gifted of men—

Those whose hearts are beating high
With the pulse of poesy—

we may venture to say that He was fain to pour forth, in some form analogous to the highest song, the thoughts to which the possession of all the knowledge concerning God with which the Sacred Humanity was endowed gave birth. The knowledge thus given to Him, like the other graces and treasures which He received at the time of the Hypostatic Union, were given not for Himself alone, but for us—for the children of the Church throughout all ages; and we may consider those instructions of His, which the Providence of His Father had determined should come down to us in the Gospel narratives, as having been framed for us as well as for those to whom they were immediately addressed. The relation of the Father, which it was His commission to make to mankind, was thus made independent of the unworthiness and dulness and hardness of heart of those by whom He happened to be immediately surrounded during so large a portion of His teaching. If we are to apply to the Sacred Heart the rule which our Lord Himself gave, and say that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, so that we may judge of His habitual thoughts by the subjects that are always upon His lips, we must certainly say that the character and perfections of the Father were ever His darling subjects of contemplation. When the heart that was most near and most like unto His own, the heart of His Blessed Mother, poured itself out in her holy canticle of thanksgiving, it was a strain that spoke of one wonderful perfection of God after another—His Lordship, His Providence in Redemption, His Condescension to the humble, His Power, His Sanctity, His Mercy, His Faithfulness in His promises, and that law of His Kingdom whereby the proud are confounded, the lowly exalted, the hungry filled, and the rich sent empty away. We cannot, then, be far wrong if we venture to approach the parables of our Lord with this thought in our minds—that they contain more, perhaps, than any other part of His teaching, His description of His Father in His dealings with those who belong to Him. Let us allow ourselves to

that God's work is so much marred and fettered in the world, that there is so little result for so great an expenditure of love, labour, and sacrifice, and that mischief is allowed to flourish in the very home of good, and to corrupt those who would otherwise serve God in innocence and faithfulness.

Such are some of the difficulties of which we speak, and they all have their answer in the knowledge of God and of His character, His attributes, and His ways with men, and most of them are touched by the remark of St. Augustine, that God chooses rather to bring good out of evil than not to permit evil. Others, again, are met as St. Paul usually, in the first instance, meets difficulties about Providence and predestination, by a consideration of the absolute lordship and dominion of God over His creatures, whom He may place under whatever conditions He will, consistently, as whatever He wills must be consistent, with His justice and His holiness. And after this consideration of the absolute authority and ownership—so to speak—of a Creator over His creatures, there naturally follow others which are required also for difficulties of another kind, as well as for those of which we have spoken—considerations of God's immense and boundless goodness, His tender care over His own, His mercy and long-suffering and indulgence to those who oppose themselves to Him, His ever-ready grace, His fatherly attention to prayer, and the like. Another great head of what we may call in general the mystery of God's government, contains the whole chain of His dealings with man in respect of his fall and redemption, the arrangements made for his recovery, the manner in which it is brought about, and the special laws of the new Kingdom which is its organ, and through which its blessings are administered. Here we come to what in a more restricted sense may be considered as the “mystery” of God's Kingdom—the Divine “economy” of grace which is worked out through the Incarnation by means of an exquisite system, full of beauty, gentleness, and tenderness, the principles and many of the details of which will be found, on close inspection, to be figured in the parables. All these things are what they are in detail on account of something which may be known and reflected on concerning God, and they cannot be understood and valued unless with respect to Him, and as reflecting His goodness or holiness, or mercifulness or justice.

This is a very imperfect as well as a very general description of the sort of truths which may be conceived as forming the more substantial points in the teaching by parables—the points to which other things are subordinated, and with reference to which those other things are best to be understood. The first of all the formal parables, which is also one of those few parables which our Lord Himself has explained in detail, seems at first sight to be a description of the different ways in which the Word of God—in whatever form and under whatever dispensation—is received by man. But it is commonly called the Parable of the Sower,²³ from its first words and from its principal figure, God, Who sows His seed broadcast and with so much profusion, and seems, as has so often been remarked, in both His material and His spiritual creation, to waste so many beginnings which do not come to maturity, for the sake, if we may so speak, of the rich and multiplied beauty and fruitfulness of a few. This law, which runs through the whole of God's Kingdom, as far as we know it, suggests many truths concerning Him—His magnificence and liberality, the manner in which even imperfect works, as they seem to us, manifest His glory, the dignity which His grace gives to those who cooperate with it, and the like; while it has a clearer significance when seen working on creations of free beings, who can cooperate with that grace or not, and furnishes a silent commentary on that failure of our Lord's own particular mission of which He had lately been so mournfully complaining. The minute details of the parable, giving so vivid a picture that we almost seem to see the spot near the sea-shore from which every feature of the image may have been taken, are explained by our Lord of the different circumstances under which so much of the good seed of the Word of God is wasted, while only a part of it takes root in good ground; and the careful mention of every several cause of failure reminds us of the particular and deliberate manner in which He more than once enumerated the successive stages of His own future Passion.²⁴ The next parable, known as that of the Tares or

²³ St. Matt. xiii.; St. Mark iv.; St. Luke viii.

²⁴ This prophecy grows in distinctness from the date of the Confession of St. Peter, when it was first made, to that of the last approach to Jerusalem before Palm Sunday. Comp. St. Matt. xvi.

answer to the objection. But, in truth, there is another interpretation of these two parables, quite as ancient and quite as authoritative as that which has now been explained, and this interpretation applies them directly to God, Who seeks or finds human nature, the human soul, the Church, the great body of His elect, and gives Himself and all that He has in the Incarnation to make the treasure or the pearl His own. This interpretation, we may venture to say, is certainly more in keeping with the Patristic methods of understanding Scripture than the former, though it is far less in harmony with modern ideas, especially among the best Protestants, to whom the moral and more practical interpretation is apparently the only valuable interpretation. We are very far from saying that the one commentary excludes the other. The one may be founded on the other. The primary meaning of the parables may be to represent the action of God in seeking us, the one great ineffable inexplicable outpouring of love of which Creation is the first fruit, Preservation, Providence, Redemption, Sanctification, and Glorification in the possession of God by the Beatific Vision for ever, the final crown ; and the sense which speaks to us of the return of the tide of love from our small and miserable hearts towards God, a return set in motion and guided and maintained by Himself, may be not only true, though secondary, but absolutely involved and founded on and a part of the first.

There remains but one of the first glorious constellation of parables, so to speak—that in which the Kingdom of God is compared to a net cast into the sea, which gathers fish of every kind, good and bad.³¹ This is commonly understood of the Church, and the argument drawn from it against the maintainers of an invisible Church composed only of good people is irresistible. But, in the view which is now being discussed, the parable has a still wider meaning, and it comes in at the end of the first series of parables as answering to and in a certain sense balancing the Parable of the Sower, which stands in the first place. For in that first parable we have the image of God scattering His seed at random, as it appears, and submitting to the loss of a great part of it for the sake of the return brought in by that which takes root in good soil. In the

³¹ St. Matt. xiii. 47—50.

Parable of the Draw-net we see that God acts thus for His own purposes, and brings both good and bad within the range of His action, in order that in the end He may select His own and reject those who are not to be His. When men cast a net into the sea, take into it whatever fish it chances to envelope, and then choose what they will have, and cast the rest away, they exercise that absolute dominion over the lower creatures which God has given them. They may be guilty of cruelty or of some other fault in their conduct to these lower creatures, but they are not guilty of injustice to them, for the lower creatures have no rights in the presence of man. So in God's dealings with us, He must always act according to the ineffable holiness of His own nature, but He is our absolute Master and Lord, as St. Paul more than once argues. We know that He is just to all, and that good and bad fishes in His draw-net are good or bad by virtue of their own will, according to the measure of their cooperation with His grace or their resistance to it. But the whole series of His dealings is for His own sake, that He may have at the end those who are His elect, and discard the rest. Thus at the beginning of this series of parables, God is represented as freely offering His grace to men who in various ways reject the good seed; and now at the end of the series, the other side of the truth is put forward, and it is God Who rejects, and even punishes; for no one is rejected by Him save through fault of his own. And this may serve to remind us of the manner in which the Apostles so frequently speak of the "purpose," the "good purpose," the "choice" of God, as the source and root of all Christian blessings on those who have them, not excluding the action of human free will in the matter, nor, on the other hand, the desire of God that all men should be saved, which involves their having from Him all opportunities of salvation. And it is to be observed, that when our Lord gives this parable, He adds an explanation of this part of it unasked, and that explanation reaches much further than the words in the parable itself: "So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just, *and shall cast them into the furnace of fire*; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."³² The selection to be made at the end of all things, the reward

³² St. Matt. xiii. 49, 50.

of the just and the punishment of the wicked, seem to be the points of the parable on which He particularly insists.

After the grand series of parables on which we have been commenting, we find no more of the same kind of teaching for a very considerable interval in the Gospel history. But St. Mark adds at the end of his account of these, "that with many such parables He spoke to them the word, according as they were able to hear, but without parables He did not speak unto them, but apart He explained all things to His disciples" (iv. 33, 34). The next formal parable, which, as we have said already, is subsequent to these by a long interval, is addressed to His own disciples, in answer to St. Peter's question about forgiving his brother seven times or more.³³ It comes immediately after His answer to the question, Who was greater in the Kingdom of Heaven? which was also, therefore, a subject of private teaching to His immediate disciples. The moral of the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant is of course obvious enough; but it should be particularly remembered that here again it is the character and way of dealing of God that is the chief and direct subject. The reason why St. Peter, in his suggestion that seven times might be enough to forgive a brother, fell so far short of the mind of our Lord, is to be found in forgetfulness of our position towards God as servants who have to give an account to our Master, Who deals with us as we deal with others, Who has promised to forgive us as we forgive others, and Who has even taught us to pray that our mercifulness towards others may be the measure of His mercifulness towards us. We are inclined to stand on our own rights, and measure the offence against justice which has been committed by those who injure us; but thought of God and of our debts to Him, and of His dealings towards us in respect of our faults, raises the question into a higher sphere altogether. And here, again, our Lord goes beyond the immediate necessity of the question in His answer, which, moreover, He enforces at the end in words which show that the central truth of the parable in His mind is the law of God's action towards us—the most absolute mercifulness and the most severe reprobation of want of mercy. "So also shall My Heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."

³³ St. Matt. xviii. 21—35; § 88.

After this new feature, as we may say, added to our knowledge of God by the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, we pass on to a number of parables spoken by our Lord in that late period of His Ministry which was mainly spent in Judæa, after His leaving Galilee in the last of His three years. A great number of incidents and discourses in this part of His Life, which is chronicled for us almost exclusively by St. Luke, and which fills up a large portion of the third Gospel, are repetitions more or less close of what had been said and done at an earlier period of His teaching—when He had confined Himself in the main to Galilee. We need not pause at present to point out how natural this is, nor how it solves completely a great number of the difficulties which have sometimes perplexed harmonists, sometimes been made use of by those who would deny the literal accuracy of the various Gospel narratives. This cycle of parables, so to call it, contains a large proportion of the most famous and well-known of all of them. It is immediately preceded by the discourse recorded by St. John in his tenth chapter as having been delivered at Jerusalem itself after the miracle of the man who had been born blind. In this discourse, although not exactly in form of a parable, our Lord sets Himself before us as the Good Shepherd Who giveth His life for the sheep. The series of parables of which we are now speaking begins with that of the Good Samaritan (St. Luke x.), and it embraces that of the Friend roused at midnight (ch. xi.), the Rich Fool (ch. xii.), the discourse about vigilance, in which the figures of the watchful and negligent servants are introduced (*ib.*), the parable again of the Unfruitful Fig-tree (ch. xiii.), the repetition of the Parable of the Grain of Mustard Seed (*ib.*), that of the Narrow Gate (*ib.*), that of the Guest taking the Lowest Place (ch. xiv.), of the Great Supper (*ib.*)—which is here given without the addition of the Guest without the Wedding Garment—of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Money, the Prodigal Son (ch. xv.), the Unjust Steward, the Rich Man and Lazarus (ch. xvi.), the Unjust Judge, and the Publican and the Pharisee (ch. xviii.).

We must place by itself another very remarkable and significant parable, related by St. Matthew in that part of his Gospel which seems to contain what have been called the special laws of the evangelical kingdom, such as the counsels of chastity,

poverty, and obedience, humility, childlike temper, perfect forgiveness of injuries, and the precept of fraternal correction. The parable of which we speak is that of the Labourers in the Vineyard—one which has given more difficulty to commentators who have not understood its occasion and purport than perhaps any other. And this leads us on to the last group of parabolic instructions, which were delivered either to the Jews in the Temple during the early days of Holy Week, or to the Apostles on Mount Olivet, at the time when the last great prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world had just been given. They are introduced by the Parable of the Lord and his Servants (St. Luke xix.), delivered as our Lord was drawing nigh to Jerusalem, “because they thought that the Kingdom of God should be immediately manifested.” The parables delivered to the Jews are those, first, of the Two Sons (St. Matt. xxi.), already alluded to, which was specially directed to the Chief Priests and Scribes, the Wicked Husbandmen (St. Matt. xxi., St. Mark xii., St. Luke xx.), and the Marriage Supper (St. Matt. xxii.) where the incident of the wedding garment is introduced. Those delivered to the disciples are the Parables of the Virgins (St. Matt. xxv.), the Talents (*ib.*), and—if that is indeed to be considered a parable, and not rather a simple prophecy—that of the Sentence of the Judge on the merciful and the unmerciful (*ib.*).

The length of this rapid enumeration of the various parts of this glorious and wonderful mass of doctrine is enough to excuse us from the attempt to speak in detail on each of the parables of which it is composed, but we may find room in our present paper to justify in regard of them the general view which we have taken of the subject of the parabolic teaching. The image of the Good Shepherd, like that of the Door, and those in later chapters of St. John, of the Grain of Corn (ch. xii.) and of the Vine (ch. xv.), do not need any explanation beyond that which is given by our Lord Himself, and their application is obvious. They picture in the most striking manner the love of God in the Incarnation, and their details contain many precious truths as to the economy of grace. The Parable of the Good Samaritan, as we commonly call it, was spoken in answer to the famous question, “Who is my neighbour?” Touchingly beautiful as it is as a simple history, the interpreta-

tion which would be satisfied with supposing that an act of extraordinary charity on the part of a humane wayfarer is here set forth as our example cannot content us, as it has never contented the Fathers of the Church. No ; the Person Whom we are called upon to imitate is our own great Father, God, in the Incarnation ; the “man who fell among thieves” is a perfect theological picture of man wounded as he is by the Fall. We are thus taught that as our forgiveness to others is to be measured on the model of the forgiveness of God to us, so our charity to others is to be as close as possible an imitation of the great work of charity—the Incarnation. Thus the mind at once rises to the same great subject of God’s dealings with us. So accurate is the picture that the theologians of the Church, in their teaching about the effects of the Fall, are often accustomed to draw arguments rather than mere illustrations from the details of this parable. The work of mercy which God has committed to us is a continuation of the work of mercy begun by Him, and the whole range of objects on which our mercy is to shed itself forth for their relief is figured in the parable, because the miseries of the wounded man represent accurately the physical and moral miseries which have been introduced into the world in consequence of the Fall, which miseries it was the purpose of the Incarnation to relieve, either directly or indirectly.

Again, God in His dealings with earnest prayer, which He often refrains from granting for awhile, and then yields to importunity, is the subject of the Parable of the Friend roused up at Midnight. God, in His dealings with those who take to themselves His gifts as their own property, and set their heart upon riches, is the chief figure in the Parable of the Rich Fool ; for it is the forgetfulness of His Mastership, and of the suddenness with which He calls men to account for their soul, which constitutes the folly which is so soon brought to nought. God’s ways of dealing with His servants, the suddenness of His coming, as if to try their fidelity, the immense rewards which He is ready to bestow on the vigilant—“He will gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and, passing by, will minister unto them ;” and “Verily, I say to you, He will set him over all that He possesseth ;”—and, on the other hand, the severe but carefully-measured justice with which He will punish negli-

gence—these are the features added to our theology by the parable about the servants. God's providential patience with communities and single persons, especially, of course, His patience with the Jewish people, is the subject of the Parable of the Fig-tree. In that of the Narrow Gate (St. Luke xiii.), which is not, however, formally a parable, the same image is, to a certain extent, supplemented by the description, which occupies almost the whole passage, of the rejection of those who are not able to enter in.³⁴ This is in reality a prophecy. The parable, as it is called, about those invited to supper, who are exhorted to take the lowest place, is at first sight a puzzle on two accounts. The truth that is set forth appears to be set forth without any image at all, and the motive suggested for taking the lowest place is not the noblest motive. But this, again, is in reality a parable which sets forth the dealings and the character of God, Who always exalts those who humble themselves, and humbles those who exalt themselves. The same truth lies behind the Parable (which also may be a simple anecdote, and no figure) of the Pharisee and the Publican (St. Luke xviii.), as in that also which immediately precedes it, that of the Unjust Judge, we have another repetition of the truth that God is pleased to allow Himself to be done violence to by importunate prayer. There is no real comparison, of course, between the unjust judge and God ; but our Lord argues *& fortiori*—"And will not God revenge His elect, who cry to Him day and night?"³⁵ We

³⁴ "But when the Master of the House shall be gone in and shall shut the door, you shall begin to stand without and knock at the door, saying, Lord, open to us. And He answering shall say to you, I know you not whence you are. Then you shall begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets. And He shall say to you, I know you not whence you are, depart from Me all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out" (St. Luke xiii. 25—28).

³⁵ It should, however, be noted that there is something special in the teaching here, which distinguishes it from such parables, for instance, as that of the Importunate Friend at Midnight. The prayer here is distinctly for vengeance, and the passage should be compared to that about the cry of the "souls under the altar of those

need hardly draw out the teaching concerning God contained in such parables as that of the Great Supper, of which it is surely not an adequate account to say that it is meant to illustrate the truth that men refuse the offers of God on account of their love for earthly goods. The manner in which the supper is supplied with guests, and the stern rejection of those who have once refused, "I say unto you that not one of those men that were invited shall taste of My Supper," is a picture of that characteristic of God celebrated by our Blessed Lady, *Esurientes implevit bonis, et divites dimisit inanes*, of the principle which has prevailed in His Kingdom ever since the angels fell and men were called to fill their places.

Of this cycle of parables which we have mentioned as delivered chiefly in Judæa not long before our Lord's last approach to Jerusalem, there remain a few of the more celebrated to be illustrated by what we suppose to be the general view and aim of our Lord in His teaching of this kind. There are the three great parables in the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke, the combined meaning of which is too obviously to our purpose to need more than simple mention—the Parable of the Lost Sheep, of the Lost Piece of Silver, and of the Prodigal Son. The unity of purpose in this wonderful chain of parables is manifest from the ending of the last, if from nothing else; for at the beginning of the Parable of the Lost Sheep we are told of the murmuring of the Scribes and Pharisees at our Lord's condescension to sinners, and at the end of the Parable of the Prodigal we have the picture of the elder brother, so exactly answering to the conduct of those whose murmuring gave occasion to the whole discourse. It is useful to have so certain an instance of unity of purpose in different parables, because we learn from this that it is a characteristic of this mode of teaching that various truths concerning the same subject are more naturally told in different

that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held" (Apoc. vi. 9—11.) This part of St. Luke's Gospel is probably drawn from materials collected by him while St. Paul was in prison at Cæsarea for two years (Acts xxiv.), at a time when the Christians were groaning under persecution. This may help to ex lain v. 8.

parables than in one, while, at the same time, a parable may be made to develope, as it were, a second part, the subject of which is to illustrate a new truth. The three together give us a complete history of God's action towards sinners in tolerating them awhile, in not refusing them many good things to which they have, in an improper sense, a natural right, in letting the will of His creatures go its own way, in anxiously seeking them, whether in His own Home, the Church, or outside the fold, in welcoming them back, and making His Angels rejoice with Him over their recovery. It shows, if we may so say, how full our Lord's loving Heart was of the dealings of God with man, that He should have been at the pains to draw out so elaborately the full picture of those dealings on occasion of a simple murmuring against His own condescension, and it is remarkable how the strain of condescension is carried on even to the end, where the elder son is rebuked only in the gentlest way by the remonstrance and almost the apology of his father.

The two parables that follow—those, namely, of the Unjust Steward, in the sixteenth chapter of St. Luke, and of the Rich Glutton and Lazarus, in the same chapter—are of that secondary class in point of form of which we have already noticed some instances. There is no actual representation of one thing by another, nor is there any declaration that the Kingdom of Heaven is like this or that. Both of them might be true stories. But they are commonly reckoned among the parables, and belong to the same class of teaching with the rest. And here, too, we might contend that the principal object throughout is to set forth the dealings of God with man, instead of man's own way of acting. At this time of His teaching our Lord was particularly occupied in denouncing avarice and an undue love of earthly riches. The first parable, that of the Steward, teaches the true use of these riches ; but the lesson is enforced by two truths which stand out from the narrative, the one that God will exact a strict account of the stewardship of every one ; the other that riches rightly used in almsdeeds are taken in satisfaction for sin, and purchase pardon. The same reference to the laws of God's Kingdom concludes the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, in which the veil that hides the unseen world is lifted up, and two great principles of the providential order are put forward in the words, first, "Re-

member that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things ;” and then, “ If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if one rise again from the dead”—which are full, moreover, of actual prophetic meaning.

The great Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard would require a long essay to itself to draw out all its significance. We may, however, remark that its difficulties will vanish to a great extent if it is considered in the light of the context, and especially in the view which is here maintained that the laws of the Divine government of the world, and especially in the Church, form the main subject of the parabolic teaching. It was just after the memorable case of the rich young man who had come to our Lord to ask what he must do to gain eternal life, and had been offered the highest and noblest of vocations, “ If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven, and come, follow Me.”³⁶ Just before, too, our Lord had set forth another counsel of perfection, that of absolute chastity, and had said pointedly, “ All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given. He that can take, let him take it.” And then St. Peter had asked his famous question, “ Behold, we have left all things and followed Thee, what therefore shall we have ? ” Our Lord first promised to them the special reward of the Apostolical Office, and then added the hundred-fold and life everlasting for all those who left what they had to leave for Him. “ And many that are first shall be last, and the last first.” The parable which follows is evidently a commentary on these last words, which are repeated at its close, after the answer of the householder to the labourers who had entered first, and who had complained of the reward given to the others. “ Is it not lawful for me to do what I will ? Is thy eye evil, because I am good ? So shall the first be last, and the last first. For many are called, but few chosen.”

These simple considerations go far towards explaining the main drift of this parable. Our Lord’s teaching at this time, mainly addressed to His disciples only, turned upon the difference of vocations in the Kingdom of God. There are some to whom counsels of perfection are addressed, some who

³⁶ St. Matt. xix. 16, seq.

cannot "take" them. There are some who are not called to leave all and follow Christ in the closest way, and some who are called to that. St. Peter's question had elicited from our Lord a declaration of the surpassing reward which awaits those who have high vocations and follow them faithfully. It may be said that the whole system of formal states of perfection in the Church is founded upon the doctrine here laid down. That doctrine implies that God, Who is just and bountiful to all, yet chooses whom He will for the higher callings in His Kingdom. He is the Father of all, the Lover of all souls; but there are those whom He calls to higher privileges and more glorious states in this world and in the next than others. But yet the masterful freedom of God in His choice and in the distribution of His gifts goes still further yet. The rewards of the next world do not necessarily correspond to the outward callings in this. There are first who are last, there are last who are first. Those who are called to states of perfection, or, again, to conspicuous positions in the visible Church, or of Apostolical labours and duties, are not of necessity either the only chosen ones of God or His dearest souls. Notwithstanding the pre-eminence of such states, the really highest places in Heaven are for the Saints, those who are truly nearest to God in this world and in the next; and the Saints are to be found in all vocations and states of life—married or single, secular or religious, princes, warriors, as well as priests, rich as well as poor, young as well as old, not according to the quality of their outward state, but according to the intensity and richness of their inward grace and the faithfulness of their cooperation with it. God may put the highest graces in the lowest vocations, He may raise to consummate perfection in a few weeks or months as in a long course of years. This free munificence and absolute choice of God is the main lesson concerning Him in the parable before us. It is a law of His action, as truly as the law of exalting the humble and resisting the proud. To all He can say, "I do thee no wrong;" I give thee what thou hast deserved and far more. "I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will?" Surely we may venture to say that without this lesson the doctrine as to counsels and states of perfection would have been even

incomplete. And the law of God's free choice in the disposal of His gifts is the same, in whatever of its operations we seek the more particular interpretation of the details of the parable. We find no fault with those who understand the callings at the several hours of the historical dealings of God with the Jews or Gentiles, for it is important to bear in mind the truth that He acts towards nations and communities as wholes, and in great measure on the same principle as with single persons. In any case, the Divine law on which the parable turns is that expressed in the words already quoted, "Is it not lawful for Me to do what I like?" Glory and reward always correspond to grace and virtue; but grace and virtue are gifts of God, and they are not distributed by Him in any servile obedience to the state or condition in which His Providence has placed us. Nor do we find fault with another usual interpretation, according to which the envious selfishness of the murmurers is the vice against which we are warned. Rather it is clear from all history—from the history of the conduct of the Chief Priests and Pharisees to our Lord down to the most recent experience—that no temptation is more dangerous to those who are favoured by high vocations in God's external Kingdom, as ecclesiastics, or dignitaries, or workers in His vineyard, than the temptation to jealousy or envy—the peculiar temptation of those whose states secure them from grosser falls. Such faults are often obvious to all but those who fall under them, as the envious motives of our Lord's enemies were obvious to the Roman Governor. "For he knew that for envy they had delivered Him."³⁷

Another great doctrine about God is contained in the Parable of the Lord and his Servants, which may have been meant to steady the excited expectations of our Lord's followers as to some immediate external triumph, without serious long-continued conscientious work for their Master. It is another manifestation of the mastery and dominion of God that is contained both in the parable generally, and especially in the treatment of the negligent over-cautious servant, who thinks he does enough for his lord when he brings him back what he has received from him—"Lord, behold here is thy pound, which I have laid up in a napkin." Yes, there is a sense in which it

³⁷ St. Matt. xxvii. 18.

is true of God—"Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up what I laid not down, and reaping that which I did not sow ;" that is, He requires work and fruitfulness, the sweat of the brow and the toil of the brain, and the multiplied pounds—"His own 'with usury.' " But then it is He that gives the power as well as the occasion to work ; it is He that guides the labouring hand and gives life and energy to the teeming brain. The multiplication of the pounds is His work, the success of the labour is His, and the reward of the labour is ours. "A necessity lieth upon me,"³⁸ says St. Paul, "for woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel !" And our Lord had already insisted upon this truth to the Apostles, when He had told them in one of those parables of the secondary kind, of which we have omitted special notice,³⁹ how men behave to their servants even after they have laboured all the day, making them when they return home first bring their masters' dinner and wait upon them, and not till after that take their own refreshment. "Doth he thank that servant for doing those things which he commanded him ? I think not. So you also, when you shall have done all those things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which we ought to do." So frequently does our Lord insist upon that entire dominion of God over us, which it is so easy and so pernicious to forget.

We thus come to the parables of the Holy Week. That of the Two Sons has already been spoken of.⁴⁰ That of the Vineyard and Husbandmen, which immediately follows, is applied by our Lord Himself to the fearful rejection and chastisement of the Jews for their continued abuse of God's graces, and it contains, moreover, the doctrine of God's long-continued patience and of the public vengeance with which He at last visits those who have persecuted His messengers—the guilt of which persecution, in the case of the Jews, was to be so awfully enhanced by their murder of His Son. And we must observe the force with which our Lord⁴¹ insists on the Scriptural principle, "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is

³⁸ 1 Cor. ix. 16. ³⁹ St. Luke xvii. 7.

⁴⁰ St. Matt. xxi. 28—32.

⁴¹ St. Matt. xxi. 42; St. Mark xii. 10, 11; St. Luke xx. 17, 18;
Vita Vitæ, § 136.

become the head of the corner”—quoting words which were afterwards used by St. Peter and St. Paul. In the same way the parable which stands next in order—the last which our Lord addressed to any but His own disciples—that of the Marriage Feast, is a picture of the law of Divine action towards men. It repeats in a more pointed manner the lesson as to God’s dealings contained in the former Parable of the Great Supper, but it varies the details in a manner that gives it a prophetic reference to the same subject as the last. Here it is not merely, “I pray thee hold me excused,” but they “laid hands on His servants, and having treated them contumeliously, put them to death. And when the King heard of it, He was angry, and sending His armies, He destroyed those murderers, and burnt their city.”⁴² Then, again, another parable is made to attach itself to the latter part of the original, that of the Guest without a Wedding Garment. And here again we have another feature in the image of God as He reveals Himself in His dealings to us—His severe purity that will not allow of anything unclean or common in His sight, and that jealous punishment of presumption which is as characteristic of Him as His immense mercifulness, condescension, and bounty.

Again, deeply significant as are the last of all the parables, those of the Ten Virgins, the Talents, and—if that be one—the image of the Last Judgment, with which the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew concludes, the doctrine which they teach us about God is so unmistakeable as to make it unnecessary for us here to dwell upon them at any length. It is the suddenness with which He will call us to account, or the severity with which He will visit simple negligence, or again, the reward of those who are found ready, and the abundant recompense of those who have laboured faithfully, or the peculiar love with which He regards works of mercy, which seem to be, in a sense, more dear to Him than the acts of other virtues for a particular reason connected with the great subject on which we have been all along engaged—that of His providential government of the world. For, let it be asked, as it often is asked, with misgivings and doubts, which, under the present state of society, have taken deep hold of many a heart that would willingly find no difficulty in the doctrine of Providence—let it be asked how

⁴² St. Matt. xxii. 6, 7.

has God—Who feeds the ravens who call upon Him, clothes the lilies of the field, and lets not a sparrow fall to the ground without His knowledge and permission—how has He provided for the wants of those who are of more value than many sparrows, the hungry, the naked, the poor, orphans, widows, the sick, the afflicted of every class? The answer is surely this, that apart from special interpositions of His power, He has provided for them by the Christian charity of their brethren. He has left them to us, and He has made us the ministers charged with the execution of His behests of mercy to them, as He has charged earth and air and dew and rain and sea, the teeming ground, the fostering ray, the genial shower, fruits and trees and herbs and flowers, and all the resources of nature, to provide for the wants of His lower creatures. The machinery of nature does not fail—well would it be if our charity and mercy to our fellow-men failed as little!

Mercy, then, is the provision which God, the Author and Ruler of society, and especially of Christian society, has made for human miseries, manifold as they are; and this great scene of the Judgment Day thus answers in a remarkable manner to the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Thus also it appropriately closes the long series of the parables. We can see how it is that in this great unfolding of the ways of God to mankind in His Providence, the closing scene of the whole history should be made by our Blessed Lord to turn upon the judgment of men as to this point—how they have fulfilled their duty as to the administration of that service of mercy which is their peculiar part, a part which God has so much at heart, in the great order of His Kingdom. Doubtless He repairs in a thousand ways the effects of their coldness and negligence; doubtless He crowns a thousand virtues and punishes a thousand faults, beside the virtue of mercy and the fault of unmercifulness. But it is a law of His Kingdom, a law set forth in the Old Testament as well as in the New, that “He gave to every one commandment concerning his neighbour,”⁴³ and the first sin committed against human society was that of him who asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”⁴⁴ No wonder, then, that the last of our Lord’s revelations concerning His Father in publicly judging the world through Him, should be that which

43 Ecclus. xvii. 12.

44 Gen. iv. 19.

tells us how strictly this law will be vindicated, how much will depend on our practical remembrance or practical forgetfulness of His own most tender words—"Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, ye did it unto Me"—to Me, your Brother and your Redeemer, the Beginning and Author of your regenerate supernatural life; to Me, your God, your Governor, your Provider and Preserver, Who have committed to you so large a share of the Providence on which your brethren depend.

We may add a single word as to the general principle of the interpretation of the details of the parables, as distinct from the purpose which we may assign to each of setting forth some great law of God's action in the government of His Kingdom. The examples which we possess of the interpretation of parables by our Blessed Lord Himself, in the case of the Parable of the Sower and that of the Tares or Cockle, certainly seem to favour the belief that almost every feature of the comparisons by which Divine truths are thus represented has its counterpart in reality. At the same time this principle might probably be urged too far. In the second of these two great parables, for instance, one portion is left by our Lord unapplied, for there is nothing in His explanation which corresponds to the servants who go to the master of the field, and ask him how it comes that there is a mixture of bad seed with good, to whom he gives the significant answer, "Let both grow until the harvest." We need only observe, that we have been occupied for the present with the important point of ascertaining some general principle which may enable us to look at once to the great truths which are the main subject of the parabolic teaching, and that when that is once established, if it can be established with any accuracy, it must of necessity furnish a most valuable key to unlock the difficulties of the picture in each case, instead of in any way excluding the idea of their deep and varied significance.

BOOK I.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST PARABLES. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

St. Matt. xiii. 18—23 ; St. Mark iv. 10—25 ; St. Luke viii. 9—18 ;
Story of the Gospels, § 61.

[IT was in the second year of our Lord's Public Life, and after some months had passed since His return into Galilee from the feast at Jerusalem mentioned in St. John's fifth chapter, that He began for the first time to put His teaching to the people in the form of parables. Not long after His return into Galilee, He had begun that policy, so to speak, of retirement before His enemies, now full of malice against Him on account of His miracles, especially those wrought on the Sabbath Day, which St. Matthew notes in Him as a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaias.¹ About the Pentecost of this year, the formal election of the Apostles seems to have been made,² and this election seems to have been immediately followed by the Sermon on the Plain, in which so much of the teaching of the previous Sermon on the Mount is repeated with great comparative reserve on account of the altered circumstances of the time. These circumstances were manifold : the increased hostility of the ecclesiastical authorities to our Lord, the greater dulness

¹ St. Matt. xii. 15—20 ; Isaias xlivi. 1. ; *Story of the Gospels*, § 45.

² St. Mark iii. 13—19 ; St. Luke vi. 19—26 ; *Story of the Gospels*, § 46.

of heart of the audience, and the greater admixture of Gentiles among their number. After the Sermon on the Plain followed the miracle on the centurion's servant,³ and shortly after, the raising to life of the widow's son. St. John the Baptist then sent his disciples to our Lord to ask Him, "Art Thou He that art to come," on which occasion our Lord worked a great many miracles in their presence, and after their departure, spoke in the highest terms of the sanctity of St. John and his high place in the Kingdom of God. It was then that He added His words about the miserable lot of the cities which had not done penance at His preaching and miracles, and spoken tenderly and beautifully, exhorting those that laboured and were burthened by sin to come to Him to find rest and refreshment to their souls. These words probably brought to His feet the Blessed Magdalene.⁴

After this, had followed the great calumny against Him by the Scribes and Pharisees, imputing to the agency of Satan this miracle on the blind and dumb demoniac.⁵ This had been followed by the demand for a sign from Heaven, which also provoked our Lord's severe reproof. Our Lord was, soon after, again at Capharnaum, close to which town He now delivered the first series of parables of which we are now to speak. It is clear from His language, when in answer to the inquiry of His Apostles He assigned a reason for the adoption of this new method of teaching the people exclusively by parables, that the hardness and

³ St. Luke vii. 1—10; St. Matt. viii. 5—15.

⁴ St. Luke vii. 36—50; *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 52—54.

⁵ St. Matt. xii. 23—37; *Story of the Gospels*, § 56.

dulness of their hearts made them unfit to receive the treasures of heavenly doctrine concerning His Father, which He now began to wrap up in this particular form. He seems at this time, indeed, to have been most anxious to set forth the necessity of carefulness and devout attention in those to whom His words were addressed, as if even the eagerness with which the people thronged after Him from all parts was far from enough to secure them against the dangers which threatened unworthy listeners.]

A great deal has been written concerning the general scope of the parables, as well as the particular signification of each single parable. It is enough to remind ourselves that our Lord's great design seems to have been to teach His intelligent hearers more and more concerning the character of His Father, His ways of dealing with men and His government of the world, while other truths concerning our duties to Him and our behaviour in presence of His gifts are blended with those which form the more immediate subject of the discourse. It is also clear that our Lord intended His Apostles to learn a great number of truths from the parables which would help them in their labours for souls. The first great cluster of the parables, comprising those which were now delivered from a boat to the people on the sea-shore near Capharnaum, contains both these heads of teaching. The Parable of the Sower⁶ going forth to sow his seed represents God, or our Lord Himself, scattering the seed of the Word with the utmost profusion, while we have the

⁶ St. Matt. xiii. 1—9; St. Mark iv. 1—9; St. Luke viii. 4—8.

various classes of hearers represented in the ground, good or stony, by the wayside, shallow, or overgrown by thorns, on which the seed fell. The next parable, that of the Wheat and the Cockle, represents another law in the Kingdom of God.⁷ In this we have not only the good seed that is wasted, but the bad seed which is actually sown, and which springs up by the side of the good seed which is not wasted. The tolerance with which God bears with evil is explained in the simple words, "Suffer both to grow until the harvest," and, inasmuch as in the spiritual order there can take place a change which has no counterpart in the physical order, that is, the cockle may become wheat, or the wheat degenerate into cockle, there is a great significance in the reason given, "Lest perhaps gathering up the cockle, ye root up the wheat also together with it."

The six parables—those of the Seed which grows secretly, of the Grain of Mustard Seed, of the Leaven, of the Hidden Treasure, the Precious Pearl, and the Draw-net, which follow on those two which have been already mentioned, may be considered as completing, each by the addition of some special feature, the picture here drawn by our Lord of His general dealings in His Kingdom.⁸ God addresses Himself to His creatures, and allows them to refuse or accept Him, He tolerates His enemies till the harvest, for their own sake and for the sake of those among whom they live. The Parable (given by St. Mark alone) of the Seed that grows gradually, seems to picture that progress from one virtue to another which is the course of those who belong to

⁷ St. Matt. xiii. 24—30.

⁸ St. Matt. xiii. 31—35; St. Mark iv. 2 —34.

God, and which accounts for the abundant thirty-fold, sixty-fold, or a hundred-fold, of which mention has been made before. The image of the Grain of Mustard Seed seems to represent the outward development and magnificent growth of the work of God in the world, while that of the Leaven explains the law of its growth, which is from within, by the silent spread of the influence of grace, and the assimilation of those natural elements in the mass on which it works which are congenial to it. The Parables of the Treasure Hidden in a Field⁹ and of the Precious Pearl may be understood either of the influence of grace on the hearts of those who understand and appreciate the value of God's favours and gifts, or directly of the love of God in seeking out our human nature, or the human soul, or the Church, and all that He has done in the Incarnation to make the treasure or the pearl His own. The last parable, of the Seine, or draw-net, represents the Church as gathered together by God in order that He may choose the good and reject the bad, thus balancing and explaining the doctrine contained in the former Parables of the Sower and the Cockle.

Any careful reflection on the great truths which are thus set forth in these parables will enable us to see, in part at least, why our Lord did not directly and openly proclaim them. He explained some of them at great length¹⁰ and with much minuteness to the Apostles, in a manner which suggests to us that every detail in these beautiful

⁹ St Matt. xiii. 47—50.

¹⁰ St. Matt. xiii. 18—23; St. Mark iv. 10—15; St. Luke viii. 9—18;
St. Matt. xiii. 36—46.

pictures is meant to have its counterpart in the truths which they represent, and He spoke as if He was satisfied with the intelligence which they had acquired concerning them. Something has been elsewhere said to explain the general purpose of our Lord in the parabolic teaching, the first instances of which must now be made the subject of more particular study by us. We shall see how very wide is the range of this teaching, and how it can easily be understood that not all that the Apostles and disciples might learn from it was naturally to be proposed, without some reserve, to the people at large. Our Lord has been at the pains, not only to explain the first parable at considerable length Himself, but to leave behind Him in the Gospels this explanation, as if to furnish us with certain principles of interpretation for other similar cases, in which we are more or less left to ourselves in the study of His Divine words. It will be seen that the subject-matter of the whole of this series of parables is more or less the same, and, when we come to try to unfold the great treasures of doctrine which it contains, we shall perhaps be no less astonished at the amount of truth which is here condensed and compressed in so small a space, than at the details of the parabolic teaching in themselves. In fact, it would require many volumes to set forth the whole of the riches of Christian truth that were here handed over to the devout consideration of the Christian student in words so few and so simple.

It will be easily remembered that the first parable describes the fate, so to say, of the Divine seed of the Word of God, under the image of the issue of an

actual sowing, in the case of which there were four several kinds of seed, or rather, four several results of the committal of the seed to the ground. In the first case, the seed had not been allowed to remain in the ground at all. In the second case, it had sprung up for a short while, and then had withered away. In the third case, it had sprung up and been choked. In the fourth case alone had it come to maturity and produced its expected fruit, thirty-fold, sixty-fold, a hundred-fold. The causes of failure in the first three cases had been various. In the one it had been that the seed had fallen by the wayside or on the footpath, where it had been trodden under foot or snatched away by the birds of the air. In the second case it had fallen on stony ground without depth or moisture, and had not been able to withstand the scorching rays of the sun in consequence. In the third case it had grown up in the midst of thorns, which had sprung up and choked it, depriving it of the moisture and support from the soil which it required. Here, then, is a sufficient variety of causes of failure, and on the other hand there is the counterbalancing description of the good soil, the fruitfulness of which is enough to compensate for more failures than those which have been spoken of. At the same time it is obvious that a hearer who had only very imperfectly perceived the drift of the parable in our Lord's mouth must have been stimulated to much anxious questioning as to the several causes of unfruitfulness of which he had heard, and have been eager to know what was represented by the wayside, what by the fowls of the air, what by the stony ground, what by the thorns, and how he could secure for the Divine

Word, which was represented by the seed, that happy reception in his own heart which was figured in the prolific return of the good soil. And, as it must be remembered that the Apostles were now in the course of formation by our Lord, for that holy Ministry among the souls of men for which they were destined, it is easy to imagine that they also must have been full of speculation and surmise as to the precise meaning of the short but most pregnant parable which they had just heard. There need be no doubt that the parable was but a simple adaptation to Divine purposes of what was passing before their eyes, perhaps at the very time when the words of our Lord were spoken. The seed-time was now come, in what we should call the early winter season, the work of husbandry was in full course, and many of those who listened to the discourse must have had practical acquaintance with the details of which our Lord spoke. There was no difficulty about understanding so simple a figure, as far as the figure itself went—but what were the verities concealed behind these commonplace details?

There are points, as we shall see, in the Divine economy or way of action, to parts of which the present parable refers, which our Lord did not draw out even for the instruction of the disciples. He did not tell them, for instance, how it is that God has chosen, in imparting His truths to men, to act as a sower of seed, rather than in any other manner. He might, for instance, have acted as the planter of trees. He might have planted just as many as He wished to grow. Or He might have acted as a builder, according to an image which we find used of Him elsewhere in Scripture, Who provides all

the material of His edifice, and wastes none of it. Again, our Lord spoke here of the ground as having this or that quality, on which He makes the success of the process depend, and He says nothing of the good qualities of the seed itself, or of the sunshine and rain and air which, as a matter of fact, have so large a part in the production of the fertile harvest. He is describing the various causes of failure, and He does not describe the causes of success except so far as they are left to be inferred from the effects of their opposites. Still less does our Lord here draw out the very important truths connected with the possible improvement or deterioration of the particular kinds of soil of which He speaks, as how the stony ground may become moist and deep soil, or how the thorns may be weeded out, or how the good soil, in its turn, may be turned into the barren. That there may be changes thus wrought in the conditions under which the seed is received, is implied both in the giving of the parable itself and in the words which our Lord subjoins, "Take heed how you hear," and the rest. But it is the principle of the parabolic teaching, that various truths belonging to the same great subject are kept for treatment in several and successive parables, and not often combined in one. The truth on which our Lord insists, in particular, relates to the various dangers which beset the good seed when it is sown, as it is sown ordinarily, by being scattered broadcast over the world.

It may also be remarked in the outset, that the conditions of which the parable speaks increase in badness and goodness in an inverse measure—that is, that the first condition of the seed which is

unfruitful is the worst of all, that in which the prospects of a favourable issue is altogether taken away, for the seed by the wayside is caught away from the heart by the evil spirit. The condition which comes next in order is that of the seed which grows up and is then withered by the burning heat of the sun, and in that case also, though there has been some progress towards fruitfulness, the further hope is altogether defeated. The seed thrown among the thorns is in a less unfavourable condition, because there might be a hope of its fruitfulness if the thorns are removed. In the case of the seed sown on the good soil, the first increase is of thirty-fold, the second of sixty-fold, and the last of a hundred-fold. Thus, our Lord seems to imply that all the dangers must be avoided successively, and not one alone—the pathside, the fowls of the air, the unprepared soil, the choking thorns, and that even when the seed is fruitful it may become more fruitful, the thirty-fold become sixty, the sixty a hundred-fold. Again, it may be remarked that it is not fairly to be gathered from this parable that the greater part of the seed is wasted. Although there are three out of the four conditions in which this waste takes place, yet they are not conditions which could not naturally be expected to be verified in the case of the greater part of the seed sown by the sower. In all ordinary circumstances, the great majority of the seed would be thrown on the good and fertile ground, and not on the stony soil or among the thorns, or by the wayside. And the return of the good seed as stated by our Lord is never less than thirty-fold, while in other cases it reaches as much as a hundred-fold—far more than enough to reward the labour and expendi-

ture of the husbandman, even if he loses some of his grain among the thorns and in the other ways mentioned in the parable. So far, then, the effect of this parable is not such as generally to discourage the Apostolic labourers for God, though it is certainly such as to cause great carefulness and fear among those who have the opportunity of listening to the Word of God. For even though the number is not to be so very great of those who hear the Word of God altogether in vain, still there are all the dangers to be escaped of which our Lord speaks under the various images of the wayside, the shallow soil, and the ground occupied by the thorns.

This is the first part of the parable, and it corresponds to the few words with which it had begun—
“The sower went out to sow his seed, and some fell by the wayside and the birds of the air came and ate it up.” St. Luke adds one detail more, namely, that the seed was trodden down before it was eaten up. The Sower, then, is our Lord Himself, and the seed that He sows is His own, not the word of another, and whether it be this or that person who, having his commission from our Lord, sows the seed, it is our Lord’s Word and He is the principal Sower of it.

The whole language of the parable seems to suggest that our Lord is mainly speaking of the sowing of the seed by means of the ordinance of preaching, for in this case it is that it is most common for seed to fall by the wayside, and to be scattered broadcast over the audience, as it were. But still it must be remembered that the Divine Word and the grace of God may be offered to men in many different ways and by many different means, such as example, or conversation, or reading, or that

kind of contact with the truth in the persons and characters of those with whom we live, which but few people can be altogether without experiencing. If all these kinds of the sowing of the seed are not directly included in the scope of the parable, it is certainly true that the words of the parable may be easily accommodated to them. The explanation given by our Lord of that which He says takes place when the seed is cast by the wayside or trampled under foot, is that men hear the Word of God and do not understand it. There are many causes of want of understanding in men, some of them intellectual and some of them moral, and we must suppose our Lord to be chiefly speaking of the latter. It is a part of the faithfulness of God, as our Creator and Lord and Provider, not to make the Word or the doctrine of salvation too difficult for men to understand if they choose. But it is also a part of His wisdom and justice to require attention, on their part, to the message which is delivered to them in His Name. The sensual man, St. Paul tells us, perceiveth not those things which are of the Spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand.¹¹ And it is in this part of this great parable that we must look for the case of those who do not understand because they do not attend, and who do not attend because their hearts and minds are full of other things, other interests, other desires, which bind them down to things of earth and of sense. The pure holy Word of God, speaking to the heart about the value of the soul and of the law of conscience, and of eternity, and of judgment, can be, in a thoroughly sensual worldly heart, only like a grain

¹¹ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

of delicate seed which has fallen out of the hand of the sower on to the common pathway, where many a foot is sure to pass in the course of a short space of time, which will infallibly crush it and destroy its life and power of fructification. The images of sin and self-indulgence on which such hearts delight to dwell, and the blasts of passion, of lust, of anger, of pride, of envy, and the like, which sweep over them from moment to moment, are like so many ironclad heels to trample down the tiny seed which has fallen there as if by chance. This is a different case from that to be mentioned presently, of the cares of the world and the like which choke the seed. The heart entirely engrossed with passion, pleasure, vanity, and frivolity does not take in the Word at all, any more than the trodden pathway receives the seed into its soil.

But our Blessed Lord dwells chiefly upon another feature, in the case of such hearts as these, which it is even still more important to have continually before our minds. He tells us of the activity of Satan in snatching the seed as it is sown. It is not enough for him that the heart is hard, it is not enough for him that men are their own tempters, their own enemies. He must exercise his hellish vigilance and malice, in taking care that there shall be no chance left of the germination which is still possible as long as the seed remains in the heart. He must catch it away, as the birds of the air pick up the stray seeds which they find on the highway. Here is a point in the parable which we should not, perhaps, have suspected, if our Lord had not Himself drawn our attention to it—that what seems simple forgetfulness or indifference or dulness is

often the direct result of the action of Satan on the soul. It is the experience of all who try to pray or to meditate, that they are visited with a swarm of distractions and interior troubles at such times, of which they do not find themselves the victims at other times. And so it is certainly, in the case of those who hear the Word of God in the administration of the ordinance of preaching. "Wonderful," says an old writer on the parables, "is the envy of the demon and the hatred of Satan against those who hear the Word of God. It is then that he brings on sleep, it is then that he introduces the twittering of swallows, that is the inopportune words of those who neither listen themselves nor will let others listen, the cries of infants, the barking of dogs. It is his wont then to bring up the thought of our domestic cares, of lawsuits, and the like, which may hinder the attention, or he sets people to judge of the preachers, so as to complain of the length of their sermons, or of their too great subtlety, or their dryness, or their obscurity. He makes them pass sinister interpretations on their language, or the loudness of their voice, or on their reproofs of those whom they address. In short, in every way possible he makes it his aim, either that what is said may not be heard, or that if it is heard, it may not be understood, or that if it is understood, it may slip away from the memory, or at all events may not be put into practice."¹²

And it would certainly be a great gain to many souls, if they would more carefully realize the doctrine which is contained in this passage from our Lord's own lips, namely, that the Word of God preached

¹² Salmeron, *in loc.*

from the Christian pulpit is, indeed, our Lord's own word and not the word of man, and that, on the other hand, the common temptations which ordinarily hinder the great mass of men either from frequenting sermons or from profiting by them, are nothing more or less than the work of the devil. He knows what we do not realize, that the Word of God, when preached by His appointed ministers, has the promise of the assistance of Divine grace in the hearts of those who listen to it as the Word of God, and therefore it matters comparatively little, whether the preacher be eloquent, or learned, or adorned by the gifts which make up the great orator. For what is required for the cooperation of grace, is the right intention on the part of the preacher, and the right and docile disposition on the part of the hearer. And as we constantly hear of some of his emissaries, in countries where the sect is established which makes it a rule not to call in the assistance of the Church, whether in life or in death, straining every nerve to prevent the sinner who is on his death-bed from having the opportunity of making his peace with God by means of the Catholic sacraments, and for this diabolical end watching day and night by the side of the poor dying man lest he should repent, so do these words of our Lord describe the malignant activity of the evil one in shutting out, if he can, every chance or hope of the access of the Divine Word to the soul of the hearer.

It must not be supposed that in this part of his warfare against souls Satan acts in any different manner from that in which he ordinarily acts. He prefers to make men their own tempters, and he

does not interpose in his own person, with any of his more violent assaults, unless there be need. The evil spirits have no need to show themselves prominently in the case of men who are already to a great extent their slaves, by having given themselves over to the bondage of their passions, and there is even less need for the intervention in any preternatural way of those enemies of mankind, in the case of persons who are thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of the world, which breathes a heresy more subtle, and more universally destructive and exclusive of the movements of grace, than the mere brutalities of lust or anger. But at the same time that this is true, it is very well to be reminded, as we are by this point of the teaching of our Lord, that what appear to be little accidents and annoyances, trifles in themselves, and of no account at all, except that they are as successful and powerful as the most serious impediments that can be imagined in diverting the attention of the mind or the heart from the Word of God, are in truth the devices of the evil one, who knows as well as any most skilful general that in war nothing is to be despised. The saints of God think nothing too minute as a precaution for securing the calm and uninterrupted leisure of the mind which has either to pray to God or to listen to God, and it is not wonderful that those who hate the intercourse of the human soul with its Maker and Lord as much as the saints and the angels love it, should avail themselves of every little thing for the sake of hindering the blessed seed, which has in itself a power of fructification so marvellous, from lighting on a soul in which the wonders which it may work

are unlimited. It has been said more than once, that it is a feature in the saintly mind to discern the action of the evil spirits in the slightest and commonest incidents of daily life, and certainly this doctrine of our Lord tends to confirm this instinct of His saints.

In the case of this seed which falls by the way-side, the hope of its success is ended when the birds of the air have done their work and taken the seed away. The second instance of failure in the seed, of which our Lord goes on to speak, is in some respects not quite so fatal, and in other respects it is more lamentable. In the case of which we are now to speak, the good seed of the Word is taken in with a certain amount of readiness and avidity, but the shallowness of the soil prevents its striking its roots deep into the soil. "*And these likewise are they that are sown on the stony ground, who when they hear the Word immediately receive it with joy, and they have no root in themselves, but are only for a time, and when tribulation and persecution ariseth because of the Word, they are presently scandalized, they believe for a while, and in time of temptation they fall away.*" It must frequently happen in countries like those in which these parables were spoken, that the scorching sun of the summer soon withers up the shoots, which have sprung up in ground which has not moisture or depth sufficient for the strong nourishment which is required under such conditions of atmosphere. Our Lord uses this circumstance as an illustration of another form of danger to the good seed of the Word of God. That Word is so congenial to the needs of human souls, it is so full of the sweetness

and wisdom of God, and of the beauty which naturally belongs to all His works, it comes to men when they are so exhausted with futile efforts to find out the truth for themselves, and to provide in some sort of way for the craving after what is true and beautiful and holy which belongs to them as His intelligent creatures, it breathes peace and hope and security, and answers so perfectly the questions by which men are ordinarily tormented, that it is not wonderful that it should be welcomed at first by many souls which yet have not the strength to undergo trial for its sake.

At the time when this parable was spoken, our Lord must have had before His mind many cases to which the description of the seed sown on the stony ground would apply. The Gospel teaching had been presented to the populations of Galilee with a charm and attractiveness quite unexampled. He had been Himself the Preacher, and He had recommended the beautiful doctrines which He delivered by His own ineffable graciousness of manner, as well as by hundreds of miracles of mercy. He had been received with enthusiasm, and at first there was no opposition to His teaching and no hostility to His Person. It was but natural that men should flock to such a Teacher, and that the Divine doctrine which He scattered around Him, as the sower scatters his seeds, should have been eagerly caught at by thousands. But even as He was speaking, the scorching sun of adversity was in the air above Him, and we have already heard of the plots against His life, and of the extreme malignity of the calumnies against Him. It was not to be a transient storm. Things were

to go on as they had begun, and the persecution was soon to pass on from Himself to those who believed in Him, till at last He was to die by the hands of His enemies on the Cross, and the mere fact of being His adherent was to be enough to mark any one out for the most cruel treatment at the hands of His own nation. It was soon to be a matter of experience, that the seed which was to spring up from the sowing of the Gospel teaching would need deep roots and a soil in which it could fasten itself securely, for that it would be tried most severely by adversity and persecution.

The persecution which awaited the faithful disciples of our Lord in that country and nation was but a type and figure, so to say, of the difficulties which would always beset the following of Jesus Christ. For many centuries the world continued outwardly hostile to the Church, but even after that state of things ceased, and after the foundation of the Christian system of society, it was to be the same. That is, the practice of the precepts of our Lord, and much more of His counsels, could not be carried out without strong and well-grounded virtue, without the gifts of the Holy Ghost in the intelligence and in the heart, without charity and the love of God mastering the soul. The number, so to say, of skin-deep Christians may be greater or less, under particular states of external conditions in the Church, according to the relation in which she finds herself to the powers of the world, as it is easier to be a Catholic in England now than in the reign of James I., or to be a Christian in Japan now than in the reign of Taicosama. But the external conditions of the

Christian communities make little difference in the opposition between the spirit and the body, in the battle between sense and conscience, in the attractiveness and seductiveness of the world, in the charms of wealth and of earthly success, and in the poison of the cup of pleasure. The Christian must take up his cross, whether he lives in the days of persecution or in the days of peace, and as long as this remains true so long will it be true that many a seed is cast on stony ground, which will be infallibly withered by the scorching rays of the sun.

But when the seed has escaped the danger which is signified in the parable by the stony ground on which it has yet fallen, there yet remain other perils before it can be as fruitful as the intention and the care of the sower require. "*Others there are who are sown among thorns; these are they that hear the Word, and the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts after other things entering in, choke the Word, and it becometh fruitless.*" They are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit. It appears that the thorns which are here spoken of are more probably brambles and briars, such as are used for hedges, as marks for the limits of property, and for the defence of the soil devoted to the good grain, and though perhaps cut down each year, they would spring up again at the ordinary time, and being of strong and rank growth, would soon outstrip the good grain and overtop it. Then such plants have a way of interlacing their shoots, so that at length they would form a sort of cage, under which the good seed would be stifled. This is the image which

our Lord here uses for the description of that very large class of Christians who render to the good Sower so little return for the seed He has sown at so much cost, because their hearts are filled with the cares and pleasures and ambitions and aims of this world. The description is in itself so graphic and so true as scarcely to require any further commentary, although one of the Fathers has said, that we should never have hit on the interpretation of the thorns which compares them to riches and pleasures, because these things have not in themselves anything that pricks like a thorn. Yet true experience shows how all these things are full of anxiety, when the mind dwells on them as objects of desire, and spends itself in schemes and contrivances for acquiring them. Our minds are too small to be occupied with many things at once, and therefore the mere devotion of our attention to these worldly matters is enough to hinder us from giving ourselves to the things of God, and this is the case even when men of high virtue find themselves in posts of importance, and obliged, by the duties of their state of life, to give the greater part of their time to such duties. And again, there is nothing soothing or satisfying even in the possession of these things, a possession which is always beset by uncertainty, always liable to a thousand dangers, and is a constant fret to the soul which has to attend to it.

But it is much more commonly the case that the cares of the world lead the soul actually away from God, because they tend to fix the affections and the desires of the heart upon these false goods, they tend to lead to unlawful aims and unlawful means of gaining those aims, to injustice, to fraud, to

violence, to falsehood, and when these earthly goods have been acquired, they tend to fill the mind with pride and licentiousness, and so to the blinding and degradation of the soul by lusts of all kinds. Our Lord sketches the evil with a light hand, and spares the full details of the consequences of worldliness on the spiritual character. By doing this He sets before us the great truth, namely, that it is sufficient for the heart and mind to be occupied with worldly things, in order to hinder the growth and fertility of the good seed. Even if these things could be made the chief objects of life without leading to positive violations of the law of God, the simple occupation of the mind with them would act as the network of briars acts on the shoots of wheat that are inclosed and stunted beneath it. Our Lord has before Him the whole fruitful range of the Christian virtues, the manifold fertility of the gifts of grace and of the Holy Ghost in the human soul, that immense richness of yield of which our nature is capable under the influences of grace, and He warns us that this fertility cannot be under the circumstances of which He is speaking. "The Word becometh fruitless, they yield no fruit"—terrible words indeed for the Christian to hear concerning himself, when he has the faith which tells him of the endless glories and riches of the Eternal Kingdom, all of which are to be acquired here and now, and can never be acquired at all unless the precious seed of which our Lord is the Sower takes deep root and fructifies in the heart.

Finally, our Lord turns to the other side of the picture, the side which was to His Sacred Heart the one sufficient consolation for all the disappoint-

ments of which He has before spoken. “*These are they who are sown on the good ground, who hear the Word and receive and understand it and keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience, and yield the one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred.*” The circumstances which are here mentioned with regard to the good soil seem to be selected with reference to the other instances already mentioned in which the seed has not been fruitful. To hear the Word, to receive and to understand it, is just what has not been the case with the first class of the careless and inattentive hearers, out of whose hearts it is the office of Satan to snatch the Word before it has a chance of becoming fruitful. Those who receive it and bear fruit, and those who are said to keep it and receive it, as St. Luke puts the words, “in a good and very good heart,” are those in whom there are not that shallowness and want of solidity which are figured in the stony soil, nor those external hindrances to fruitfulness which are to be found in the ground in which the briars and thorns spring up alongside of the grain.

And again, beyond this distinction between the good soil and the bad, there is in the language of our Lord a very clear indication of the great variety of degrees in which the fertility of the good soil, as such, shows itself. For He says that one yields thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred-fold, and that all these bear fruit in patience, that is, under the discipline and exercise of affliction and of the cross. It is clear that every word of this parable is meant to have its design, meaning, and importance, and that short as it is, it is intended to sketch for us to all time the variety of the results of

grace, and especially of the apostolic preaching of the Word. In the case of the fertility of the seed to which the Word of God is compared, it may be said that there is difference between seed and seed, not that all is not seed, but that one grain may have a more rich power of fructification than another, and in the same way there may be differences even between one portion of earth and another, as to richness and fertility, and there may also be differences between the advantages of rain and sun and air, and the like external helps, in one case and in another. In the same way it may be with the souls of which our Lord speaks. The Word of God may fall on one favoured soul with an extraordinary power of light and influence, for God is not bound to give to all equally, but to all sufficiently. On the other hand, there may be differences in the readiness of the will, in the thorough generosity with which the soul surrenders itself to the influences of grace; or the vigour and energy which it applies to the cultivation in itself of what it has received. And again, there may be differences in the external conditions under which various souls correspond to the graces which they have received, conditions which depend on the good providence of God, as when one person has the advantage of living in the company of a saint, or in a home where every evil influence is carefully shut out, or where there are greater opportunities of profiting by the common means of grace, the sacraments of the Church, the preaching of the Word, and the like. In all these ways one good soul may have greater opportunities or greater faithfulness than another, and thus it is

that the Kingdom of God is to be adorned by the fruits and flowers of sanctity not only in various kinds, but also in various degrees within the same kind.

CHAPTER II.

THE PARABLE OF THE COCKLE AMID THE WHEAT.

St. Matt. xiii. 24—28, 36—53; *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 59—62.

OF the series of parables of which we are now speaking, there are two only which have been explained for us at length by our Lord Himself. There are the two first in order, and, as we may fairly conclude, those which He thus explained may have been considered by Him as of the very highest importance. Taken together, and with the rest, they present a very complete view of the conditions under which the Gospel teaching has to be carried on in the world, and they explain the principles of the Divine government in that teaching in a manner which it would have been difficult to ascertain so clearly, if we had not this distinct interpretation of the figures by our Lord Himself. It is well, therefore, to subjoin at once this parable, with its explanation, to the Parable of the Sower, and the interpretation of that parable given by our Lord.

“Another parable He proposed to them, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a man that sowed good seed in his field. But while men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat, and went his way. And when the blade was sprung up, and had

brought forth fruit, then appeared also the cockle. And the servants of the good man of the house coming said to him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it cockle? And he said to them, An enemy hath done this. And the servants said to him, Wilt thou that we go and gather it up? And he said, No, lest perhaps gathering up the cockle, you root up the wheat also together with it. Suffer both to grow until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the cockle, and bind it into bundles to burn, but the wheat gather ye into my barn." "Then having sent away the multitude, He came to the house, and His disciples came to Him, saying, Exound to us the parable of the cockle of the field. Who made answer, and said to them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man. And the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the Kingdom, and the cockle are the children of the wicked one. And the enemy that soweth them is the devil. But the harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. Even as cockle therefore is gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the world. The Son of Man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all scandals and them that work iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the just shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

In the Parable of the Sower, our Lord had described Himself as content with a good deal of failure in the beneficent work He had undertaken for mankind. He had intimated that He knew that much of the good seed which He came to sow would be wasted, and He had described the various

manners in which that waste would be brought about. In some cases the seed was to be snatched away by the devil, as the seed by the pathside is snatched up by the birds. In other cases, the seed was to fall as it were on stony ground, and wither away, the hearts in which it had been sown being too shallow and weak to give it strength enough to withstand temptation and trial. In other cases the souls in which the seed was sown would be engrossed by worldly cares and ambitions, by the love of riches and other temporal things, unsatisfying in themselves and unable to supply the soul with true happiness, but still attractive and deceitful enough to occupy the mind and heart to the exclusion of the true goods. In these cases the good seed would be stifled and made unfruitful. On the other hand, He was to find His reward and the recompense of His labours in the good seed which would spring up and return Him thirty for one, or sixty for one, or even a hundred for one.

Here, then, our Lord had said but little of the action of the evil one on the world. It is true He had given a most important lesson as to that action, for He had pointed out that the utter forgetfulness and inattention with which so many careless persons come to lose their opportunities, and to be as if they had never heard the good word, were due, not simply to their own recklessness, but to the direct action of the devil, taking the seed out of their hearts, whether by direct action on their memories, or by filling their minds with other thoughts and affections which were sufficient to exclude the thoughts of faith and religion and the work of grace. But for the remainder of the mishaps which

were to prevent the fruitfulness of the seed, our Lord said nothing which could hint at the positive activity of the spirit of evil in the field which was sown by the Word of God. There remained, therefore, these two great features in the description to be added by a new parable. The first of these was the further action of the evil one which our Lord would permit, according to the general laws on which the universe is now governed, and the second was the manner in which God acts with regard to this action of His enemy. These two great features, then, form the special subject of this second parable.

In the Parable of the Sower, it will have been remarked that there is a transition from one point to another, in the use of the image, from the seed sown, to the persons in whose souls the seed is sown with so many diversities of issue, as to fruitfulness or the reverse. The seed is the Word of God, and yet the seed sown or dropped by the wayside are the heedless hearers, the seed sown among the thorns or on the stony ground are those who fail in this or that way to profit by the grace of God. So in the parable now before us, the seed is said to be the children of the Kingdom and the children of the wicked one respectively, while the Son of Man sows the first and the evil one sows the other. This transfer of the image is necessary in this second parable, for in this there is question of the manner in which God will treat those who are occasions of evil and scandal in His Kingdom. The parable deals with persons rather than with things. But for the strict interpretation of the parable according to the lines of theological truth, we must remember

the language of the Parable of the Sower, in which the seed is in the first instance the Word of God, and in the second instance the persons in whom the Word of God is sown. The devil has no power to create evil, and our Lord in His dealings with the world gives or offers graces to all. He does not create good souls, and leave evil souls to be created by His enemy. The parable speaks of the result of the action of our Lord on the one hand and of the action of Satan on the other, as being good and evil men, but in the truth to which the parable corresponds the evil are not purely and originally evil, nor so absolutely corrupted as to be beyond hope of recovery, and the good are not so good as to be preserved from the possibility of becoming evil, although wheat cannot become cockle nor cockle wheat. What is permitted to the devil is to ape and imitate, as well as to thwart as far as lies in his power, the action of God.

Our Lord looked forward prophetically to the history of the Church—nor had He far to look, when He knew already that among His own chosen disciples there was one who would turn out a true child of the wicked one—and He saw that which would always be the marvel of His saints and the special cross of His dearest friends, thrt the field in which the Gospel seed was to be sown woudl, when the time came for the fruits of the sowing to become manifest to the outward eye, be found to be full of a growth which certainly was not of the Gospel. This is a phenomenon for which no account was furnished, as has been said, in the former parable, and our Lord represents it as a matter of surprise and complaint to the servants of the good master

of the field. Who these servants are we are not distinctly told by our Lord, but the fact that the angels are said in the end of the parable to be the reapers is hardly sufficient to make us conclude that the angels are not also these good and zealous friends of their Master, Who would fain purge His field at once of the weeds which had so suddenly appeared. The unfolding of the Divine plan of the government of the world, and especially of the Church, is spoken of in Scripture as the great study of the angels, who have not by nature the knowledge of the future, and to whom the beautiful wisdom of God reveals itself gradually in the course of events. And besides the angels, God has always among His servants on earth many who spend their days and nights in the prayerful contemplation of the progress of events in the world and in the Church, and to such also, far more even than the angels, the phenomena of human history, and especially of that part of it which concerns the fortunes of the Catholic Church, are the subject and occasion of continual amazement and wondering surprise. The angels, no doubt, would willingly, if it were the will of God, exert their wonderful power in the destruction and removal at once of all scandals in the Church. And the chosen saints and servants of God yet upon earth, must burn with zeal at the sight of so much evil and so much mischief, and would gladly call down fire from Heaven, as Elias did, and as the two Apostles, the sons of Zebedee, would have done on an occasion mentioned in the Gospel history itself. For the desolation and ruin produced in the fair field of the Church by the evils of which our Lord speaks, are certainly enough to make the hearts of the

friends of God boil over with indignation, and with desire for redress.

It is remarkable that in the parable itself the answer which our Lord puts into the mouth of the good householder is not simply, as might be supposed from the common version, "An enemy hath done this," but "A man who is an enemy hath done this." And when our Lord comes to explain the figure which He has used, He says simply the enemy is the devil. It may be that we are meant to understand, even from the language used by our Lord, that though the arch enemy and the principal agent in the attempted ruin of the fair harvest is the devil, still he acts mainly through the instrumentality of men. Another truth which may be conveyed by this language is, that the evil agencies are always posterior in date to the good agencies. The devil sows over the ground which has already been sown by the Son of Man, he follows the lines and works over the work of God. The Fathers are very fond of understanding this parable, in a particular manner, of heresies, rather than of other evils, which proceed, like heresies, from the evil spirit and his subordinates, and according to this interpretation, it is very easy to see the force of this remark about the manner in which the evil one acts in spoiling the work of God. For all heresies are perversions of the truth, they require the truth of the Catholic doctrine as their foundation, they have no originality in themselves, and the devil their author has no creative power, he can but mar and distort and pull to pieces. But it is not necessary to confine the meaning of this great parable, in which the agency of the devil is described, to that single department

of his work which issues in the production of heresies, and what is so plainly true of his procedure in this one part of his work, is also true of his work in other ways. He is essentially a copyist, a mimic of God, as if his insane thought that he would be as God was always repeating and forcing itself upon him, as the poor animals who ape man in his ways, are never quiet or happy, while they see him do anything, without attempting themselves to mimic him. The intense malignity of the character of Satan must not make us forget this feature in the same character—the feature of a most insane and foolish vanity, a feature very remarkable in those who have sold themselves to do his work in the world. One of the surest tests of the heretical spirit is the unwillingness to acknowledge mistakes and misrepresentations, when they are pointed out, and this unwillingness is founded on personal vanity. It may safely be said that a writer on the side of heresy or schism who shows any eagerness to acknowledge and correct the errors in statement into which he has fallen, is already half converted. And yet the want of this simple honesty is one of the commonest characteristics of heretical controversialists, and it shows most clearly the spirit by which they are guided.

Another point may here be noticed. As God in His dealings with mankind acts according to His own infinite wisdom and knowledge of human nature, and so of all that it requires and of all that is adapted to influence it, and to supply its wants and cravings, the plan which He has followed in His Kingdom must of necessity cover the whole ground and penetrate every department of humanity.

It is the plan of the enemy, therefore, to proceed on his own work of mischief wherever God has extended His own beneficent operations, and thus the work of the evil one is aptly described as the sowing of bad seed over the good seed which God has sown. This is said in the parable to have been done while men slept, and if this particular also is to have its counterpart in the truth, we must understand that our Lord refers to the necessity of the utmost vigilance on the part of those who are responsible for the good estate of the field sown by Him, and to the truth that the beginning of the activity of the evil influences is to be traced, more or less, to the want of watchfulness on the part of the rulers of the Church. This, however, may perhaps be pressing the figure too far, for nothing is said in the explanation of the parable by our Lord of this want of vigilance. It may be that He means us to understand that there is always a great deal going on in the unseen world around us, and with direct reference to ourselves and to the welfare or ruin of our souls, of which we can have no more perception than men can have of what goes on in the hours in which they are naturally wrapt up in sleep.

These few words, then, of our Lord, "An enemy hath done this," contain the whole of what He tells us here of the ever active and most malicious exertions of the evil one and his emissaries for the purpose of destroying the good work which God has begun in the world. As the enemy passes over the field in which the footsteps of the sower of the good seed have gone before him, and leaves no part of that field unvisited and, as far as lies in him, unspoiled by the seeds of evil, such we must suppose

our Lord means us to consider is the activity of the enemy in scattering his evil influences wherever our Lord has left behind Him the principles of good. Alas! it is but too true that there is no part of the field to which Satan is forbidden to penetrate. Nothing is too sacred for him to besoul. It is natural enough to expect his work in those regions of society which are more especially under his influence, which we call, by pre-eminence, "the world," the mass of those who worship temporal goods and aims, and regulate their conduct by the maxims of time and not by those of eternity. But the work of the enemy is not only here. It is to be found in the sanctuary itself. The Church of God is provided by the care of its Founder with an admirably organized hierarchy, a complete army of selected souls, vowed especially to the service of the altar, to the life of prayer, to the ministration of the sacraments, to the government of the general body, to the defence of the true doctrine, and to the preaching of the Word of God. It is Satan's chiefest joy and greatest triumph when he can sow seeds of evil in the sanctuary and around the altar of God, and though he has never been allowed for long together, or to any overwhelming extent, to corrupt the ruling body and fill the sees of Christendom with prelates who might be described as legitimate successors rather of Annas and Caiaphas, than of the Twelve Apostles, still he has not been altogether without his successes in this most vital assault on the good work of God. Incalculable as have been the services to the Church of God of the great majority of her chief rulers, her history would be different indeed from what it is if the world had

never been able to intrude its own children into their ranks. Pride, vanity, worldliness, personal ambition, jealousy, avarice, nepotism, an indolent and a luxurious life—if such scandals as these had never been in the sanctuary of the Church, she might not at this moment have to lament the falling away of so many fair kingdoms which once owned her gentle sway. As a matter of fact, the greater number of heresies and schisms in the Church have had their origin in the clerical order itself, and in many cases they have arisen among ecclesiastics of the highest rank.

If Satan has been allowed to see the evil shoots manifest themselves in the very highest orders of the hierarchy, it is not wonderful that in other parts of the field of the good householder the same miserable enjoyment should not have been denied to him. The enclosed garden of religious life, the cultivated retreat in which Evangelical Counsels are made the rule of daily practice under the sanction of vows, this also has been invaded by the malignity of the evil one, and the souls most immediately consecrated to God have sometimes been the occasions of the greatest triumphs to His enemy. As the ecclesiastical state has its own peculiar temptations, such as those which have been enumerated, so also are there found, among the religious communities, the seeds of evil particularly fatal in their case. So again it has been in that other garden of beauty and fruitfulness in virtue, the holy domestic life of the Christian family, formed on the model of the holy home at Nazareth, and the cares of a household and the lawful worldly callings to which the members of such families are naturally devoted,

have been the occasion of a thousand seductions and of a thousand instances of forgetfulness of God. Not a calling, not a profession, not a pursuit, from the most laborious scientific investigations to the simplest relaxations and recreations, into which some evil seed has not been cast, as it were, to occupy the ground. The whole of society may be looked on as a field sown by the hand of God and intended to return to Him the fair fruit of obedience to His law and glorification of His bounties and benefits to man. And yet every department has its evil traditions and examples and principles asserted against those of God and of our Lord, nor can there be any truer picture either of the natural society of man or of the supernatural kingdom of the Church, than that which our Lord here gives, the picture of a field covered with two growths of seed side by side, the one good, the other evil.

This, then, is the chief part, so to say, of the parable, the declaration on the part of our Lord as to what was to be expected in the field in which the Evangelical labourers were to spend their work—a picture true indeed of the history of the world before He came and before the foundation of the Gospel Kingdom, but far more true prophetically, as a forecast, for the benefit and warning of the Apostles and those who were to come after them in their work for God. For the true picture of the state of the world before the time of redemption might perhaps have more properly been said to be that of a field in which there was but, here and there, a faint trace of the Divine culture, a few shoots of good wheat among a forest of shoots of cockle. But it was all the more surprising, after the work

of our Lord and after the establishment of His Church, that even in that chosen field so carefully cultivated and fenced round, there were still to be these many shoots of the evil seed in every department and in every corner. Our Lord knew what was in man, as it is said of Him by St. John. He did not need the experience, even of His own reception at the hands of the chosen nation, to show Him what was to be expected by His Church at the hands of the world. But He knew also what was in Satan, and He knew how intense would be the fresh activity into which the enemy of God and man would be roused by his defeat and by the destruction of his kingdom and power in the world. He knew how he would fasten on all the weak points in man, and work all the lower influences of his nature against his own good, all the more zealously because he would see, in the new creation of the Church, a world capable of giving far more glory to God than that former natural world which he had been allowed to deface and to turn into a dominion of his own. And the whole process of the efforts of Satan in the Church and their issue is summed up in these few words of our Lord, "An enemy hath done this."

The enemy, then, of God and man will not be excluded from making his malignant attempts on the fair field of the Church, as he was not prevented from assailing the beautiful and innocent creation of God when man was first made. The evil which sin has introduced into man remains in the Kingdom of God as long as the time of probation lasts, that is, the conflict of the flesh and the spirit is to go on even in regenerate man, although immense forces of grace have been supplied to him for his easy

victory in the conflict. And so neither is the activity of the evil spirits fettered or put an end to, though men are wonderfully stronger for resistance against these deadly enemies than they were before the coming of our Lord. As a consequence of these two truths, the field of the world in which the good seed has been sown is to be still what it always was, a field in which good and evil grow up side by side, nor is there to be any part of it in which the work of the evil one is not to be rewarded by a kind of miserable success of its own. But then, the question rises up—it must certainly have risen up in the minds of the angels as they watched the progress of the Gospel Kingdom—how will God deal with the evil shoots which have covered so large a space on this field which He has sown and is to be continually sowing? When evil sprang up in Heaven, God did not tolerate it. The evil shoots were uprooted at once and cast away. Even in the history of His dealings with man, the principle of swift vengeance and extermination has not unfrequently been followed. Once the whole race of man was destroyed, except eight persons, and there had been other instances of summary chastisements, only less signal than that. What is to be the law of God's action in the government of His Church, or of the world into which He has sent forth His Church?

The answer to this question is contained in the reply of the householder to the servants who volunteer to go at once and root up the cockle. "Wilt thou that we go and gather it up? And he said, No, lest perhaps gathering up the cockle, you root up the wheat also together with it. Suffer both to grow together till the harvest, and at the

time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the cockle, and bind it in bundles to burn, but the wheat gather ye into my barn. The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. Even as cockle is therefore gathered up, and burnt with fire, so shall it be at the end of the world: The Son of Man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all scandals, and them that work iniquity, and shall cast them out into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the just shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father."

It is remarkable, in the first place, as to this answer of the householder in the parable, that our Lord in His explanation does not give any commentary which answers directly to the words, "Lest gathering up the cockle you root up the wheat also together with it." He dwells mainly on the final separation, and on the fate of the cockle, gathered into bundles to be burned, as if it was more important to enforce on the minds of His hearers the truth of the final chastisement of the scandalous and the wicked, than that other truth of their toleration in His Kingdom, and of the reason which is given for that toleration. He seems almost to take it for granted as a thing not to be wondered at, that there should be scandals which are not at once eradicated, and to wish to point more forcibly to the future destruction of all offences and the thorough purgation of the Kingdom. For the toleration of evil is a principle already established in His government of the world, and therefore it was not to be expected that any change in this principle should be made as long as that

human world goes on in its present provisional state. But in the former parable He had said nothing of the future Judgment. He had spoken simply of the various causes of the sterility or failure or fertility of the good seed, as if there had been no responsibility for all these various issues on the part of those in whose hearts the seed had been sown. This new feature in the whole picture, therefore, was yet to be supplied. But in the second place, although our Lord's own commentary seems thus to leave aside the reason assigned for the refusal of the householder to consent to the immediate rooting up of the cockle, it cannot be wrong for us to suppose that there are Divine reasons for that toleration of the evil shoots which is the characteristic of the present providence of God. Thus we find the Fathers of the Church explaining for us in more than one way the words of the householder on which we are now engaged.

We may insist, however, so far on the silence of our Lord, with regard to the meaning of this first part of the answer of the householder, as to see in it the truth that one prominent reason for the forbearance which is inculcated on the servants, lies in the certainty of the future retribution on all that can cause scandal or offence in the Kingdom of God. The punishment is only delayed, the perfect purgation of the field of God is only put off for awhile. That being the case, it remains for the prudent householder to deal with the cockle as he thinks best in his own interest, that is, in the interest of the wheat. For the sake of the wheat it is that the cockle is to be spared awhile. If the cockle is rooted up, the wheat may suffer. It may be rooted

up with the cockle. In the growth of which the seed is the Word of God, in the growth in which the good seed are the children of the Kingdom, it is quite clear that a reason exists which cannot be expressed in the same image which is here used by our Lord. For cockle cannot become wheat, nor can wheat become cockle. But the good can become bad, and the bad can become good. Thus, the immediate rooting up of the cockle might have cost our Lord the souls of such saints as St. Magdalene and St. Paul. And it is a part of the chief duties of the servants of God in the Apostolical ministry to be constantly labouring, in the spirit of the Good Shepherd, to turn the cockle into the wheat.

But, apart from this reason, one which could not be expressed in this parable by our Lord without a change of imagery, there are sufficient reasons assigned by the Fathers for the toleration of the cockle by the side of the wheat, even if the cockle is never, by conversion, to become the wheat. For the existence even of scandals and heresies and divisions among the subjects of the Church is of use, as the Apostle says,¹ in order to the manifestation of the faithfulness of those who are faithful. Too many bright examples of suffering heroically for the sake of God would be lost, if He were to interfere by an exercise of His power in the destruction of the rebellious and the schismatical. Again, the presence of the wicked, and even of the scandalous, in the body of the faithful, is a constant stimulus to the virtue of the faithful. It gives them great objects to pray for, and to toil for before God.

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 19.

It also makes them watchful over themselves, and so must secure their virtue in many cases in which they might fall through negligence if there were nothing to warn them. Again, the wicked and the authors and abettors of heresies, are often singularly active and devoted in the pursuit of the objects which they have at heart, and in this way also they serve as spurs and examples to the children of the Kingdom. In another way also the tolerance of the wicked on the part of God is of immense use to the children of the Church. For if it were not so ordained in His Providence that those who sin against Him should be spared, it would follow that all who are spared are in a state of grace, and might feel confident of their own safety. Nothing would be more mischievous than this, for it would breed immense and false security, as much almost as if people could feel certain beforehand of their own perseverance, and of their dying a good death. These things are left uncertain by God for the sake of the elect, and if He did not leave the cockle in the field until the end this merciful design of His would be defeated.

Our Lord is speaking of the Providence of God by which the economy of redemption is governed, and which can afford to wait for the time of inflicting punishment, because it has all times at its disposal. This seems to be the answer to the objection against the discipline of the Church, which has sometimes been founded on this parable, as if it were contrary to the rule here laid down by our Lord for the rulers of the Church to punish, in a manner in which punishment is within their power, those who give public scandal in the Church,

or in other ways violate her laws. The discipline of the Church is both corrective of the offenders whom she punishes, and also wisely ordered for the common benefit. Our Lord Himself gave instructions as to those who would not obey the Church, that they were to be treated as heathens and as publicans.² St. Paul forbade the Corinthians to hold intercourse with those Christians who were guilty of certain sins, and enjoined on them the excommunication of the incestuous person.³ In his First Epistle to St. Timothy he mentions Hymeneus and Alexander, whom he says he has delivered to Satan, that is, excommunicated.⁴ And in those early times it seems to have been no uncommon thing for excommunicated persons to have been actually possessed by the devil after the sentence of the Church. And there are other passages in the New Testament which seem to bear witness to the very early introduction of the salutary discipline of which we speak. The uprooting which is, in this parable, deferred by the order of the householder, is that which is to take place inevitably in the Last Day. And as the last day to each soul is the day of its own death, it may in particular cases be anticipated by the infliction of sudden death by the judgment of God. Such was the case with the first great scandal in the Church, in the instance of Ananias and Sapphira, who were slain by the visitation of God as soon as St. Peter had passed on them his sentence of condemnation.

The question of the punishment of heretics by a Christian State is not the same as that of the

² St. Matt. xviii. 17.

³ 1 Cor. v. 4, 11. ⁴ 1 Tim. i. 20.

ecclesiastical use of disciplinary punishment. For in the Christian system of civil government, the crime of heresy is a crime against the common good, and not only against the spiritual order. The arguments drawn from this parable against the Donatist and Novatian heretics by the Fathers who were engaged in those controversies, cannot be questioned. But they only go to prove that the visible Church contains the evil as well as the good, which was what those sectaries denied, not that there is no such crime as heresy or schism which may be punished by the Church as treason and rebellion are punished by the State. It is still true that, even in the administration of these remedies in the cases just now mentioned, the Church is extremely careful lest the one great end of the benefit of the faithful should be endangered. For she often forbears to use her powers, when she sees that the use of them may do harm rather than good, and provoke a more formal rebellion instead of correcting an evil which is but in its infancy. This is probably one reason why formal excommunications are so comparatively rare in modern times, when the authorities of the Church have reason for thinking that the mass of the population in some Catholic country will not be able to take its own part in carrying out the sentence. For in that case others, besides the direct offenders against whom the sentence is hurled, will be involved in sin from which they would otherwise be free. In such cases the Church is fain to dissemble, and be as if she did not hear or see, rather than hurry on a catastrophe which may involve thousands of her children in the danger of

the loss of their souls by disobedience to her plain commands.

Some things remain to be noticed by way of conclusion with regard to the explanation of this parable by our Lord. In the first place, He describes the angels as sent forth by the Son of Man, who are to gather out of His Kingdom all scandals and them that work iniquity. For whether the field in which the seed is sown be considered as the world or as the Church, as it may be considered to be either, in different aspects of the same truth, it is in each case the Kingdom of the Son of Man, the Kingdom which belongs to Him by virtue of His Incarnation, the Kingdom which He has conquered back to Himself by His Passion, and which has been given to Him in His glorious Resurrection. Thus, even if it were true that at the end of time the scandalous and the workers of iniquity were to be found the majority, still they would be gathered out of His Kingdom as intruders and invaders, and the just would remain therein as in their true home and heritage. Thus we need not press too far the apparent argument which may be drawn from these words as to the comparative numbers of the just and the unjust. The words of our Lord seem to refer to His former words in the Sermon on the Mount, where He had said that He would say in the Last Day to many who would claim to have prophesied in His name, and in His name cast out devils and done many wonderful works, that He knew them not, "Depart from Me, you that work iniquity."

Again, it is clear that He here distinguishes between two kinds of evil which shall be alike

eradicated in His Kingdom, the evil of open scandal and the evil of the working of iniquity, which may not be open to the eyes of men but which is open to the eye of God. Such was the case of the workers of iniquity of whom He had spoken in the Sermon on the Mount, as just quoted. Again, it has been noted by some writers on this parable, that the cockle is to be bound in bundles to be burnt, as if our Lord would turn our thoughts to the accurate discrimination, even in the punishments as in the rewards of the next world, and to remind us that sinners of similar kinds will be punished together, as they are represented in the great Christian poem of the middle ages. And it is also remarkable that our Lord adds to the description of the burning of the wicked in the furnace of fire, the words, "Then shall the just shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father." Such words imply that in the future state of blessedness there shall be no concealment of virtue and spiritual beauty, whereas in the present state of things we are not only unable to see such glories as are interior to the soul, but also we are hindered, by the companionship of the bad with the good, and the consequent corruption of public opinion, from recognizing even those excellencies and perfections in virtue which would be not altogether beyond the ken of the discernment of which we are at present masters, if it were not for the overclouding of the good by the presence of the bad.

But the greatest cause of that manifestation of the just and of their spiritual beauty, which will then take place, will be the new state and condition in which all will live who have a share in that

blessed Kingdom of the Father. For in that state there will be no longer any concealment of hearts and minds, but the whole interior of the soul of each one of the citizens of Heaven will be laid open to all. This manifestation will have begun at the Day of Judgment, one of the great features of which will be the opening of all consciences and of all lives, as well as of the dealings of God with all and the gifts which He had bestowed upon each. This itself will be enough to furnish the blessed dwellers in Heaven with matter for thanksgiving to God and for perpetual contemplation and enjoyment. It will be the laying open of the full knowledge of a universe far more splendid and magnificent and various in its beauties than the physical universe, the knowledge of which is capable of imparting to us intellectual enjoyment of the rarest and highest kind. It is not surprising that the Sacred Heart of our Lord should have led Him here to touch on this point, which must be the source of endless delight to Him. He seems to touch on it here, rather for the purpose of encouragement, and as if to promise to those who shall remain faithful under the disadvantages of the present mixture of evil with good in the world, a reward which will more than compensate to them for all they may have had to endure. And perhaps the words also include the thought that the splendours of the virtue of the just in the future Kingdom of God, will be enhanced rather than diminished by the obscuration and persecution which they have had to undergo, for their virtue will have been made perfect in patience and thus the glory of their crowns increased. There is something of the same

connection to be observed in the passage in the Prophet Daniel, which was probably in the mind of our Lord as He spoke this parable. "Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some into life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always. But they that are learned"—that is, just—"shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that instruct many to justice as stars for all eternity."⁵ And our Lord seems to have wished to lead the Apostles, to whom He was explaining the parable, to dwell much in thought on the great reward thus promised to them, and to make the glory of the blessed, both in body and soul, a great motive for exertion and faithfulness in their service to His Father. For He adds here again, as if for them specially, His familiar exhortation, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

⁵ Daniel xii. 3.

CHAPTER III.

THE LIGHT ON THE CANDLESTICK.

St. Mark iv. 21—25 ; St. Luke viii. 16—18 ; *Story of the Gospels*, § 61.

IT has been well to subjoin the explanations given by our Lord of the two great Parables of the Sower and of the Cockle, to the parables themselves. But as a matter of fact, the explanations were not given at the same time with the parables. And it is not certain that other parables, of which the explanation is left to ourselves in Gospel history, were not delivered to the people by our Lord before the time came when He was alone in the evening with His disciples. The order of St. Mark, which is usually so accurate in point of chronological sequence, leads us to think that some words of our Lord to His disciples, spoken after the explanations on which we have been dwelling, are to be considered in this place, rather than at the end of the whole account of the first series of parables. And we may therefore pause at this point for the sake of so considering them, although it cannot be a matter, either of great certainty or of the utmost importance, that the words in question were spoken just at this point. They have their own importance in showing us still more clearly the desire of our Lord to make the truths of which He had been speaking sink very

deeply into the minds of the disciples. Thus they are most valuable, from the connection which they have with the main object of our Lord in this stage of the formation of the Apostles for their great work in the Church.

“And He said unto them, Doth a candle come in to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not to be set on a candlestick? No man lighting a candle covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed, but setteth it upon a candlestick, that they who come in may see the light. For there is nothing hid, which shall not be made manifest, neither was it made secret, but that it may come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.”¹

These words, like so many other sayings of our Lord, would be a parable, if only the parabolic form had been given to them. And they were spoken not to the multitudes, but to the disciples in their intimate communion with Him. They may be considered as conveying a lesson which follows naturally on the parables already delivered, but is addressed especially to those chosen friends who had been privileged to hear the explanation of those parables from His own lips. They speak clearly of the duties of the Apostles with regard to these truths set forth in the parables. They had the mysteries of the Kingdom explained to them, or rather, we may say, in the first intention of our Lord, they had been considered as capable of perceiving them for themselves, through the parabolic veil which made them less intelligible to others. For when our Lord began to explain the parables to them, He expressed a kind of surprise that the explanation was needed by them. But they were

¹ St. Mark iv. 21—25.

not to suppose that the truths thus explained were for themselves only, or that they had a right to any esoteric doctrines of the Kingdom, which were to be denied to others less favoured. The instructions which they received were not imparted to others, for the reasons already given, namely, that they were unfit for their reception, and had brought on themselves the punishment of being treated with greater reserve in the teaching of the Gospel truths. If they had been fit for these truths which were now veiled from them, though not entirely denied to them, the truths would have been set before them without the parabolic veil. The Apostles had been instructed more fully. But this was not for themselves alone. It was that they might communicate to others in due time the truths which were to be veiled from the populations of Galilee and afterwards of Judæa. Thus, if our Lord explained these parables to them, it was for the sake of others as well as of themselves, for the sake of the thousands and millions of Christians all over the world, who were to be their spiritual children throughout successive generations. He speaks as if He were contemplating His own work in them, rejoicing in it, and explaining to them that they might understand it and cooperate with it better.

He then it is Who has lighted up the candle of the knowledge of the mysteries in the Apostles. He certainly has not done this for the sake of hiding it, putting it out of the way, as a thing is put away in houses where there is little room to spare, under a bushel measure, which would easily hold useless articles, or under a bed where old lumber is often stored. No, the object which He has had in lighting

it is that all who come in may see the light. He had already spoken of them as the light of the world, in the Sermon on the Mount. But there, as it seems, He had more directly in His mind the light which they would give by their example, in the practice of the virtues of the Beatitudes. Here He is speaking of them rather as the doctors and teachers of the world. For He goes on to assure them that all that He has told them in private is for the public good. There is nothing hid which shall not be made manifest, neither was it made secret, but that it may be known and come abroad. The Christian religion has no hidden secrets, as such, although there are in it many mysteries which are not to be forced on those who are unfit to receive them. The only reason against the immediate publication of all that it contains to all, lies in the danger which arises from the unfitness of so many for Divine truths. Now as to this He has already given His precept, that the holy things were not to be given to dogs, nor the pearls cast before swine. But the time might come when men would become more fit, and if some are unfit, others may be turned to who are fit. And thus the whole beautiful system of spiritual truth is to be revealed and proclaimed, not kept hidden and jealously guarded, according to the precept which He was to give to the Apostles very soon after this occasion, and in which the words of this passage are repeated: "Nothing is covered that shall not be revealed, nor hid that shall not be known. That which I tell you in the dark, speak ye in the light, and that which you hear in the ear, preach ye upon the housetops."²

² St. Matt. x. 26, 27.

It is easy to see that there might have been inconvenience or danger in setting before the people at that time these very mysteries of the Kingdom which are conveyed in these two first parables. In the first place, they referred to the ill-success of much of the Gospel preaching on account of certain defects in the hearers, or in their circumstances. There was the danger of the ceaseless activity of the evil spirits, the danger of the shallowness and frivolity of many, the danger of the cares and interests of worldly pursuits and engagements, even though not blameable in themselves, the danger of riches, and the like. The Gospel Kingdom was not to march on from triumph to triumph, without labour or danger to those who were its children. Nay, it was to be a Kingdom in which evil men were to be mixed up with good men, in which it would be difficult to discern evil from good, in which an immense amount of good would be hindered, or at least stunted, by the contact of its contrary. This picture might be too discouraging for weak souls. As a matter of history, the great failures and miseries of the Church have always come from the worldliness or unfitness of her children, whether laymen or ecclesiastics, from their want of fervour, their want of charity, their mutual jealousies, their hateful selfishness, and consequent divisions. The failure of Christians to correspond to the graces of their vocation is the one most fruitful cause of the comparative ill-success of the Church in her work in the world. It prevents her work of conversion, it encourages doubts as to her Divine mission. It is on account of this that the heathen turn away from the Gospel, that sinners die

unreconciled, that revolts abound against authority, that heresies flourish, that schisms tear the seamless robe of unity. It is a mischief especially dangerous to those young in the faith and weak in virtue. It is a wound over which saints mourn in silence, and which the most devoted children of the Church would fain conceal, at the cost of their blood, even when they cannot alleviate it. No wonder, then, that our Lord did not proclaim it to the people. He more than once disclosed the pain which it gave to His Heart. But His words on this subject are few, and carefully tender. It was very necessary that the founders of the Church should be aware of this great danger, but it was not as yet to be spoken of. The preaching of the moral doctrine involved in these two first parables would require great authority and fearlessness on the part of the teachers, and a readiness on the part of the hearers to receive stern admonitions and the whole doctrine of the Cross.

There is no point, however, of this moral and spiritual doctrine which we do not find developed by the Apostles in the later books of the New Testament. The activity of Satan and the evil spirits in frustrating the growth of the good seed is described in more than one passage by St. Paul, to whom Satan is "the prince of the power of this air,"³ and his associates "the rulers of the world of this darkness, the spirits of wickedness in the high places,"⁴ and he draws out a magnificent picture of the Christian armament against them. St. Peter changes the image, but only for another which represents the devil as "a roaring lion who goes about, seeking whom he may devour."⁵ The heed-

³ Ephes. ii. 2.

⁴ Ephes. vi. 12.

⁵ 1 St. Peter v. 8.

lessness of so many in whose souls the Word can take no root is most graphically described in a few words by St. James. "If a man be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a glass, for he beheld himself and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was."⁶

There are many passages in St. Paul in which he warns us against levity and shallowness, which was a fault in the Corinthian Church. But nowhere does he more plainly remind us of these parables than when he is warning the Hebrew Christians against the danger of apostasy, on account of the trials to which they were subjected. "For the earth that drinketh in the rain which cometh upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is tilled, receiveth blessing from God, but that which bringeth forth thorns and briars is rejected, and very near to a curse, whose end is to be burnt."⁷ It would almost seem as if there was here a distinct reference to our Lord's words about those who, when tribulation and persecution arise because of the Word, are scandalized and fall away. There are traces throughout the whole history of the Acts, and in many of the Epistles, of trials akin to those to which the Christians of Jerusalem were exposed. St. Paul speaks in more than one place of his own persecuting fury, and we gather from his words that many Christians were put to death, others imprisoned and beaten in the synagogues, and others compelled to blaspheme.⁸ It is clear from the whole tone of the Epistles to the Hebrews that there was much danger of apostasy among those to whom it was

⁶ St. James i. 23.

⁷ Heb. vi. 7, 8.

⁸ Acts xxvi. 11.

written. Here, then, we have the prediction contained in one part of the Parable of the Sower fulfilled to the letter. Nor can there be any more plain commentary on our Lord's words about the deceitfulness of riches, than the words of the same Apostle to St. Timothy. "They that will become rich fall into temptations and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful devices, which drown men in destruction and perdition, for covetousness is the root of all evils, which some desiring have erred from the faith, and have entangled themselves in many sorrows."⁹

Lastly, the whole history of the Acts, and a great many passages of the Epistles, bear witness to the importance of the doctrine inculcated on the future rulers of the Church by our Lord, with reference to the existence of heresies, of parties in the Church, and the mixture of evil with good even within the fold. At the distance of time from the foundation of the Church at which we live, and with the history of the Christian centuries before us, we take these things as natural and inevitable in the Church and in Christian society. But it does not follow that they were not surprises to the first generation of Christians, or that the Apostles had not the greatest possible reason for rejoicing in the warnings to them conveyed in this part of our Lord's teaching. It must be remembered that the whole system of the Gospel preaching was something new in the world. There had been nothing like it before, and the conditions under which it was to be carried on were consequently unknown. When these conditions came to be ascertained by experience, as was

⁹ 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

the case within the lifetime of the Apostles themselves, it was very profitable indeed for those who had to administer the system to be able to recognize the perfect foreknowledge of them which was here manifested by our Lord, implying, as it did, a direction to them to turn their efforts to the obviating or removing of the various evils on which He set His mark.

There seems to be good reason for thinking that when our Lord speaks of all that is hid being made known, He was more directly thinking of moral and practical instructions—such, for instance, as the Evangelical Counsels, and the like. Still His words naturally extend to the office of the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, of unfolding, more and more fully, as time flows on, the treasures of dogmatical truth which are contained in the original deposit of the faith. This is the chief sphere and field of the great principle of development in the Church. Our Lord does not say that all things are to be made manifest, and preached on the housetops, at once, but that all the details, whether of practical or dogmatical instruction, which have been confided to the Church, are, in the end, each at its due time, to be made known in the light of day. It is impossible to think otherwise, when we remember that at the very time when He was using this image of the candlestick, and insisting on the manifestation of all secrets, He was setting forth a large number of most important truths in such a manner, and with the avowed purpose, that they might be understood by some of his hearers and not understood by others. The passage, therefore, before us, taken together with the circumstances of our Lord's teaching at

this time, bears clear witness to the principle of the gradual unfolding of Christian truths, whether practical or dogmatical, by the prudence and charity of the Church. And perhaps it may have been with the design of leading them to thoughtful reflection on the application of this principle that He again added His warning precept, "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."

Our Lord goes on to add some precepts as to the carefulness with which the Apostles were to avail themselves of the precious privileges which it was their lot to enjoy, of hearing His teaching. He said to them, "Take heed what you hear, take heed therefore how you hear." The ears by means of which the mysteries of the Kingdom were to be received, were the spiritual ears of the soul, strengthened and quickened by special graces for the reception of these hidden truths. Nothing could be more miserable than to have gifts of this kind, and not to use them. And yet our Lord's warning could not be unnecessary. For Judas was among these favoured Twelve. So in all ages of the Church there must have been a large number of souls, highly favoured by God, who have nevertheless, through their own carelessness and want of correspondence to grace, or by dallying with some dangerous temptation, failed to catch the Divine message by which they might have delighted and edified the Kingdom of God on earth. The Prophet Balaam, in the Old Testament, who speaks of himself as "the hearer of the words of God, who hath beheld the vision of the Almighty,"¹⁰ fell as Judas fell, by the sin of avarice. This was a case of a man who had ears to hear, on account of

¹⁰ Numbers xxiv.

an evil passion. But our Lord's words further imply the injunction of a two-fold diligence, first, the consideration of what it is that is revealed in His Divine doctrine, that is, of the dignity and sublimity of the truths which are imparted to us, and then, also, of the manner in which these heavenly boons are to be received, the reverence, the humility, the attention, the purity of motive, with which they are to be listened to and taken into the heart, there to be cherished and fed upon by meditation.

And He adds further, that in this subject-matter also there will be room for the application of that most just principle of God in His dealings with us, that with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again. This principle He had, not long before, insisted on in the Sermon on the Plain, as, in an earlier stage of His teaching, in the Sermon on the Mount. There it had been applied to our dealings with others, whether in judgment or in action, and now we are told that it will be used also with reference to our conduct in the reception of Divine truths. If we receive them faithfully, intelligently, diligently, other higher and further revelations will succeed to them. As soon as we have made one series of truths our own, another more beautiful and grander will be offered to us. And on the other hand, God will not go on imparting His lights to us, unless we use reverently what He has already bestowed upon us. This was exactly the reason why the people of Galilee in general were to be treated with greater reserve for the future by Him, because they had not mastered the teaching which they had already received. The disciples, and all those whom they represented in the Church, were to be warned lest

the same thing should befall themselves. "For he that hath, to him shall be given, and he that hath not, that also which he hath, which he thinketh he hath, shall be taken away." There is, then, no more sure method of obtaining greater spiritual lights and favours, than faithfulness in the use of those which we already have. There is no limit to the riches of God, nor is there any limit to His desire to impart them to us according to His own good pleasure. Nothing delights Him more than to give us great gifts, and though all souls are not equal in their natural capacities, the capacity of each is immense. But there are but few who do not hinder God, by their own carelessness and folly, from giving to them far more largely than they receive.

And, on the other hand, our Lord's concluding words show us another truth. This is, that it is possible to have and not to have at the same time, that is, to have in one way, and yet as to all profit from the possession, not to have, or only to seem or think to have, in another. For a truth may lie in the memory unheeded and unused, the relic of a former state of greater fervour and enlightenment, and thus the soul may be said to possess it and yet not to possess it. It may be said, that as long as it is there at all, it may possibly still be made profitable, though at the last. So it is with many a poor soul who has been educated religiously, and then abandoned the practice of religion, to fall into a state of chronic sin. In such cases there is often a wakening up of old feelings and religious instincts which have almost died out, and by means of that dormant truth the soul is able to make its peace with God before it is too late. There are many such souls

indeed, by the good mercy of God, set in motion by the power of prayer. But it cannot but be true that for one case of this kind, there are many more in which the truths which the soul has received in Christian or Catholic education are altogether ineffectual at the last, even when death is plainly at hand, and the world and its false goods are seen to be vanishing away. The dying sinner, it may be, was once a Catholic child, and as such he knew of old how to set his conscience in order, to grieve for and confess his sins, to seek the aid of the Church in the last sacraments. All in vain! he dies as he has lived, no ray of light penetrates the darkness of his soul, that little which he had or thought he had—for such persons, in life, often delude themselves by the promise that they will make all right at the last—that little is taken away from him. We often hear of the cases in which God has been so wonderfully merciful, as to give the habitual sinner, or the confirmed heretic or rebel against the Church, grace of conversion at the last. We hear of many, and there must be many more of which we do not hear. But who can count up the cases in which even that which such persons seem to have is taken away from them?

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEED GROWING OF ITSELF.

St. Mark iv. 26—29 ; *Story of the Gospels*, § 60.

THE Parable of the Cockle, of which we have last been speaking, is related by no one of the Evangelists except St. Matthew, who is, of the four, by far the most full in his reports of this kind of teaching on the part of our Lord. The reason of this is that he is far more full than the others in his reports of the teaching of our Lord in general, as distinguished from His miracles on the one hand, and from His disputation on the other. But even St. Matthew has omitted the parable of which we have now to speak, which followed next in order on the last. This, then, we owe to the faithful memory of St. Peter, under whose guidance the second Gospel was put together by St. Mark. There is something about the teaching of this particular parable which may have struck congenially on the particular temperament of the mind of the chief Apostle. For it was in his mind above all others that the gradual process of enlightenment went on, under the guidance of the good providence of the Father, which issued, in no long period of time after this, in his memorable confession of faith in the Divinity of our Lord. The gradual ripening and unfolding of the good seed

in his heart may fairly be cited as an instance of that power of fructification in the Word of God, of which our Lord is here speaking. And thus we might consider that St. Peter, in his care to preserve this particular parable for the Church of all generations, was instinctively putting on record the blessed process which had gone on in his own loyal heart.

In any case, the parable which is now to be given follows most naturally and beautifully on the two already explained by our Lord Himself. For it may be said, indeed, to grow out of the second parable as that had grown out of the first. For, in the Parable of the Sower, our Lord had only hinted at the action of the evil one in the world, saying that it was he who caught away the good seed out of the hearts of the careless hearers, and then He had gone on, in the second parable, to say a great deal more about the positive action of the evil spirit in directly propagating his wicked teaching, and the manner in which this action of his was dealt with by God. In this second parable our Lord had spoken of the seed as cast into the ground, and then, after a time, coming up and showing whether it was good wheat or only cockle, and He had described the growth of the two, side by side, until the harvest, without speaking of any exertions on the part of the husbandmen to aid it in its growth. Now He takes, as it were, this one circumstance, and makes it the subject of a special parable.

“And He said, So is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the earth, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow whilst he knoweth not. For the earth of itself bringeth forth fruit, first the blade, then the ear, after-

wards the full corn in the ear. And when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.” This parable has no special explanation given to it in the words of our Lord. For the images of the seed and of the harvest are already familiar to the hearers of the former parables, and there are no persons brought in in this, as in the Parable of the Cockle, whose work or words might require explanation. The point of the parable therefore is in that circumstance on which our Lord may be supposed specially to insist, because it is a circumstance which has not been made prominent in the other parables of the same series. This circumstance is the gradual and spontaneous growth of the seed under the ground. This circumstance would not have applied, to recur to a former illustration, if our Lord had represented Himself, or His Father, as building a temple or a house, instead of sowing seed. For in that other image it would have been implied that the work was carried on from the beginning to the end by the same hand and the same industry. For, if a builder relaxes his labour, the building is at once stopped. And if He had spoken of the planting of trees, it could not be said that the growth of the tree would be imperceptible. But the Kingdom of God, that is, the progress of the work of grace in the soul, proceeds by the innate powers of the seed sown and of the soil in which it is sown. Each of these is endowed with elements of fertility which fit in the one to the other, the powers of the Divine Word, and the powers of intelligence and volition which belong to the soul. Then, by the cooperation of these two sets of elements, the process of fructi-

fication proceeds, even if there be no more work brought to bear on the part of the sower, after he has deposited the seed in the soil, that is, the Word of God in the soul. There is something which appears like an anticipation of this parable in the Book of the Prophet Isaias, where God says, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return no more thither, but soak the earth and water it, and make it to spring, and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be, which shall go forth from My mouth. It shall not return to Me void, but it shall do whatsoever I please, and shall prosper in the things for which I sent it."¹

Although our Lord speaks of the earth as bringing forth of itself, still the parable, taken as a whole, contains the double doctrine, of the vital power of the seed and of the fertilizing power of the earth to which it is committed. He says that the seed springs and grows up whilst the sower knows not, as well as that the earth of itself brings forth fruit, first the blade, then the ear, afterwards the full corn in the ear. The earth requires the seed and the seed requires the earth, and, if nothing is said of the other genial influences, as of the rain, and the sunshine, and the air, and the like, it is probably because of the influences which correspond in the spiritual order to these elements in the growth of the corn are taken for granted in all the works of God for the benefit of souls. For grace is never inoperative, never denied in cases in which no impediment is put in its way. This parable seems intended by our Lord to place before us

¹ Isaias iv. 10, 11.

two truths in a kind of contrast. The first of these is the truth that God requires the service and work of the sower of the seed up to a certain point. This work is indispensable, and without it there can be no growth and no fertility. It is as St. Paul says, "How shall they believe Him of Whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach, unless they be sent?"² The condition of faith, which is exacted by God, renders the office of the preacher, or teacher, or witness, or messenger of God, essential. But our Lord goes on to tell us that this office is not essential after the seed has been deposited, the word delivered, the message made known. The husbandmen go away and turn their hands to other things, to the sowing perhaps of other fields, and they are not wanted again until the harvest time, when the full corn has to be gathered in. This is one truth that is set forth in this parable. The other truth is the counterpart of this, and it is required by this in order to complete it and make it perfect. The truth is, that God has given a marvellous power of growth and fertility to the word which has been delivered by His ministers, and as it were sown in the souls of their hearers. Our Lord draws out this in the few words in which He seems to linger with so much delight over the gradual expansion and progress of the seed sown. He describes the earth as bringing forth of itself, and the seed growing up, and the like, and the appearance of the blade first, then of the ear, then of the full corn in the ear. He might, as has been said, have added in other details, for He might have

² Rom. x. 14, 15.

spoken of the office of the sun, or of the rain, and the like, but all these natural forces are on the same side of the comparison or contrast, so to speak. They are not the work of the sower or of the husbandman, although he reaps the fruit of them all, and although the work of each one of them is, in its way and degree, necessary to the happy result to which He looks forward. All these things come under the head of the work of Nature, that is, in the truth which is represented in the parable, under the head of the work of God and His grace. It is what St. Paul speaks of when he says, perhaps with this parable in his mind, "I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase."³

The first point in this comparison is one on which long meditations might be made. Although God alone can read the human heart, and although He can at will act upon it by the illuminations and powerful movements of His grace, yet it has not pleased Him to deal immediately with soul after soul in the communication of that revelation of Himself which He has made to man, and in the ministration of the ordinary means of His grace in the Church, which He has founded and placed in the world as the witness of His truth and the mistress and instructor of mankind. He can flood the soul with light and grace when it pleases Him, but He has ordained that men are to learn of Him from men, and that they are to receive the sacraments and the vital truths of faith from others like themselves. Thus the Word of God is like the seed which is sown by man, and which will never spring up unless it is so sown. But the seed is to be sown,

³ 1 Cor. iii. 6.

as well as received, in faith. That is, the sower has to be content to labour without seeing the immediate fruit of his toil, he has, to use another similar image which we find in the Book of Ecclesiastes, to "cast his bread upon the running waters, which he will find again after a long time."⁴ This doctrine holds good of all the various ways in which the Divine Word may be communicated, though perhaps it is intended more specially to apply to the method of preaching. For the preacher does not know the souls of those to whom he addresses himself, nor the dispositions in which they come to listen to the Word of God, and these are in truth very different in one person and in another at the same time and in the same place. Nor does he know on whom it is that his words have taken effect, nor which of his words have had the most effect. He knows often that what he sets most store by himself, has been the least fruitful part of his instruction. And he finds out that some almost chance expression or illustration has struck home, when the {passages which seemed to himself the most important have not been so successful. And above all, which is the point most plainly set forth in this parable, he has to go his way to other work and other scenes of labour, and it is only after a long time that he may find out that his words have sunk into the hearts of men, and have there been fruitful.

This truth holds good in other instances. Such is that of the Christian writer who devotes himself to the illustration of Scripture or of the dogmas of the faith, or any other similar head of instruction.

⁴ Eccles. xi. 1.

He cannot tell by whom his words are read, or what is their effect on any soul in particular. But, after a long time, it may be, that he is rewarded by seeing the truths which he has been setting forth taking possession of a number of minds, and he may meet with this or that person who tells him that he owes the conversion or the advancement of his soul to him. What he writes is adopted by others, and thus he may preach without being a preacher, and may reach the souls of large assemblies and multitudes, while he spends his own days in retirement and study. Much the same may be said of the effect of good example, of the consistent courageous practice of the Christian virtues in the daily walk of life in which men are called to serve God. Such persons may bear a perpetual silent witness to those around them, shining, as St. Peter says, like lights in the world, without thinking of anything beyond the discharge of their duties in their several vocations. Yet it may be reserved for them in the great day of account, to see, with happy thankfulness, that they have benefited hundreds of souls, while they thought themselves the most unobserved and the least conspicuous of men. And so, in whatever other way it may be our duty or our privilege to be witnesses to the truth, whether it be in the region of doctrine or in that of practice, it is always true that we do not see the effects of what we may have to do or to say at the time, we have to go on our way and leave the result to God. It is well therefore always to be earnest in prayer, that we may be guided, day by day, to say and to do what is right and most likely to be profitable to others, and then, when all due pains have been taken, to exercise the

utmost confidence and reliance on God for the issue of our poor efforts.

The truth which is contained in the other branch of the parable is not less important or consoling than that of which we have been speaking. Why is it that the earth brings forth fruit of itself, why is it that the seed springs up while the husbandman knows not and thinks not of it? It is on account of the innate powers of the seed itself, and on account of the nourishing and developing elements in the earth. But not on account of these only, but also on account of the harmony and fitness which makes them congenial one to the other, the intrinsic powers of the seed cooperating with, and being unlocked by, the forces and influences which are supplied by the earth, and also on account of those other conditions under which the happy fruitfulness is developed, the bright and warm sunshine, the gentle breezes, the rains which make the earth fruitful and furnish to the seed the moisture which it requires. Man does his part, and it is soon done. The part of nature comes next, and it is a work which never rests or pauses till the fruit is ready for the sickle. The whole of human life, in the richest regions of the world, is simply kept up by the fertility with which God has blessed the soil of the earth. Without speaking of the marvellous treasures of the mineral creation, which are the productions to man of the soil on which he lives, the simple productive power of the earth in the ordinary returns which it makes year after year to cultivation, yields riches to the human race of which the sum total might seem something fabulous. And the bountifulness of nature, as we call it, is still

more enhanced when we consider the immense variety of fruits and vegetables with which the bosom of this common mother teems, the very large multiplication of the seeds and roots which are committed to it, and the immense fruitfulness with which it enriches us even without cultivation, while it supports also the tribes of the animal world for our use and consumption as well as man himself.

Thus it is that the wealth of the human race which is drawn from the earth alone is ever on the increase, notwithstanding the enormous consumption by which the life of the race is sustained. But it is well to remember that no fruitfulness of the teeming earth, of which the poets have sung, is to be compared in beauty and magnificence to the fertility of which the soul of man is capable, under the influences of Divine grace, and when the good seed has been duly deposited in it by the ministration of the Word of God. Thoughts, conclusions, speculations, affections, resolutions, contemplations, imaginations, are the fruits of which the fertile mind and heart of man is, as it were, the soil. And in their multitudinous variety and rich beauty these far surpass the productions of the earth on which we live, in the richest regions which man can inhabit. The mind is never at rest, the will and the heart are always choosing and loving or hating, and the result of the productiveness of each may be the whole world of the most glorious acts of the highest virtues, internal and external, the noblest aspirations which soar in a moment up to the very throne of God. Such, at least, they may be. But they may also fathom the depths of Hell and people the world with foulness and loathsome-

ness beyond all description. The grandest splendours of Heaven throughout all eternity may be the issue of the workings of a single soul, and the same may alas be said of the lowest degradations of Hell.

What is required for the production of this glorious result is nothing but the presence of the good Word of God in the soul, and the result of which we are speaking is the issue of the combination of the two forces of the soul and the Word. For the soul of man is made for the reception of the eternal truth, as the soil is created for the placing in it of the good seed, and the Word of God is fitted, because it is His Word, for the soul which He has made for it, as, in creating the physical universe, He has fitted the soil for the welcome seed which it has power of making so productive. These are the divinely conjoined elements in the production of the spiritual harvest, the richness of which as far transcends the richness of earthly fields as heaven itself is above earth—the soul, with all its faculties of intelligence and choice on the one hand, and the Word by which God addresses Himself to the soul on the other. We have every reason for thinking that the full result of which the Divine culture is capable is seen but in a comparatively small number even of the saints of God, and it is certain that we have but the faintest appreciation, under our present circumstances and with our present power, of the true glories of the spiritual kingdom as far as they exist. But we know enough to be able to understand that no yield of earthly soil, however rich and prolific, can be compared with the treasures of spiritual beauty which reward in the Kingdom of Heaven the tender love

and fatherly care for souls of the great Householder. But whatever these glories and riches may be, they are nothing but the legitimate issue of the fertilizing power of the Divine Word in its abode in the soul, which yields itself to its influence, without let or hindrance.

What our Lord seems then to wish to tell us is that all this wealth of result is something which transcends the power of the husbandman who casts the seed into the ground. That is, the work of grace and spiritual growth goes on under the good hand of God Himself, as the fructification of the seed in the ground goes on under the influences of natural causes ordained by God. It is not that man has nothing to do with the guidance and continual cultivation of the souls in which the holy seed has been deposited. He may have much to do, but it is a work, in the first place, altogether distinct in itself from that of the first implanting of the Word, and it is a work, in the second place, the whole power of which is in the hands of God. He it is that giveth the increase, though it may have been Paul who planted and Apollo who watered. And here too also He may speak historically, and He may have had in His mind the thousand instances in which the soul which has caught the good seed into itself, is left altogether independent of further teaching, but is nevertheless enabled to develope the fruitfulness of the Word by the silent action of grace. For there is no Word of God which has not in itself this fertilizing and multiplying power, no particle of Divine truth which has not an intrinsic affinity with all that is good in the soul into which it falls, which has not the intrinsic power, not to

be checked except by some positive hindrance, of awakening the soul into productiveness and fertility. Nor is there any soul of man which has proceeded from the hand of the great Father and Creator of souls, which has not been gifted by Him with the forces and faculties which are necessary for the unfolding in itself of the whole beautiful series of the Christian virtues, when it has once been touched by the gentle and life-giving presence of "the engrafted Word," to use the beautiful expression of St. James,⁵ who may have had in his mind as he used it this very parable of his Lord and Master. The doctrine which is here implied is that the immense fruitfulness of the spiritual life, as it is seen in the case of the saints of God, is not anything in itself extraordinary, in the sense that it requires special and unusual treatment on His part in favour of those whom He so much loves, but that it is the natural and legitimate result of the combination and conjunction of the powers of the Divine seed on the one hand, and of the powers of the soul on the other, under the influence of His grace. Grace is to them what the atmosphere and the sunshine and the genial rains are to the grain cast into the earth and to the earth itself.

Thus, when we read of the power of the Word of God in its greatest manifestations, as in the effect of the Divine Word in the conversion of large bodies of men at the preaching of the great apostolic Saints of the Middle Ages, or again, when we read of the fruitfulness of some single truth in the heart of one of the servants of God, as in the cases of St. Antony of Egypt or of St. Francis of Assisi,

⁵ St. James i. 21.

or of the effect of the thought of eternity on St. Stanislaus or St. Teresa, and the like, it is not to be supposed that the effects produced could not be produced, without an extraordinary influence of grace, on thousands of other souls, if only there were in them no hindrances to the full reception and welcoming of the Word. The reason of the difference between the fruitfulness of the saints, and the comparative sterility of the Word in the case of others, lies rather in the manner in which the Word is received in the several cases, than in any diversity in the Word itself, or in the powers of the souls to which it is addressed.

A very important conclusion is involved in these truths. This is, the truth of the immense and unique importance of the preaching and the hearing of the Word of God. This is a truth very much indeed ignored by those who consider that, if they or others say their prayers and frequent the sacraments, they may dispense themselves from attendance on sermons, and other occasions when the Word of God is offered to them in the church, or, again, by those who think that the Christian community can ever be in a flourishing state without the constant and vigorous preaching of the Word of God, even to well-instructed persons. Much more is this truth ignored by others, who would have the ministers of the Gospel desist from preaching the truth on account of the little apparent fruit which results from their labours. Our Lord here describes the process of the fertilization of the soul, and He certainly does not exaggerate the part of the preacher or teacher, for He says he may go his way when his part of the work is done, and leave

it to God and His grace to bring about the rest. But He does certainly say that the sowing of the seed is the one essential condition of the fruitfulness of the soul, and He encourages us to hope that fruitfulness will follow, by-and-bye, even in cases in which there is no present hope of it. Experience teaches us that a word of Scripture, or the saying of some good man, or something heard by chance in a sermon, may lie dormant, so to say, in the mind for years and yet at last wake up, as it were, and bring about a conversion. There is nothing so congenial to the soul of man as the truth of God. On the other hand, if the Christian preacher or minister of the altar holds his tongue, out of shyness or human respect, his forbearance may be of little matter for the moment, because at that particular time the soul of the other may be unfitted to close with the truth which might have been presented to it for acceptance. But it does not follow that he has not done harm which may be immensely mischievous in the future, for the seed might have been taken in, notwithstanding the reluctance of the will at that moment, and the time might have come hereafter when the soul would have been in better dispositions, and when the circumstances of the moment might have urged home the truth with irresistible power.

St. Paul illustrates this truth when he so strongly urges St. Timothy to "preach the Word, be instant, in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, entreat, with all patience, for there shall come a time when they will not endure sound doctrine."⁶ As if to say that sound doctrine must be preached when it can,

⁶ 2 Tim. iv. 2, 3.

even though it seem to be out of season, because sometimes there will be no opportunity of preaching it at all, and then men will be the better, and have a greater chance of salvation, by having had it preached to them before, even when they have not attended to it. Thus it is a matter of constant experience that men who have been well instructed in their youth, and have afterwards left off the practice of their religion and fallen even into enormous sins, are open to conversion on their death-bed, if God gives them the opportunity. Other sinners, less guilty on account of their want of knowledge, are less within the reach of the influences of grace, as they have to be instructed before they can be converted. And the sects who make it their miserable rule to do all they can to make men live and die without any relations with the Church and her ministrations, show their consciousness of this truth by the diabolical activity they evince, in surrounding the death-beds of their most hardened associates with every possible barrier against the access of the priest or of the sacraments. What they are afraid of is the innate power of the truths of religion, the seed which has been sown in their hearts while yet they were young, and which has never yet been allowed to put forth its life-giving powers.

We find many things in the commentaries of the Fathers and writers of the Church which may well be referred to before we quit the subject of this beautiful parable. We have been speaking of the sower of the seed, as if by him were signified all those who have in any way the office of witnessing to the truth, whether as appointed ministers of the

Church, or as having the duty of what has been called apostolical conversation incumbent on them, or simply as all Christians are bound to advance the knowledge of the law of God in their intercourse with their neighbours, or in their own families. The chief sower, however, in many of the commentaries of the Fathers, is our Lord Himself, and there can be no reason against this interpretation, which does not exclude the truth, that what is said of our Lord, according to the doctrine of this comment, may also be said of those who serve Him in the work of which the parable speaks. In that case our Lord may be said to speak of His own departure to Heaven, leaving the word which He has sown in the world behind Him, to work its way with the hearts of men. But it would be a loss to us if we were to be deprived of the application of the doctrine of this parable to others besides our Lord. Then, again, it could not but be that the Fathers would fasten on the picture, so to call it, which is here drawn of the gradual growth of the seed committed to the ground, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. It was natural of them to see in this description the three grades or degrees in the spiritual life, that of the beginners, that of the proficient, and that of the perfect. The blade is the tenderest, the ear is stronger than the blade, and the corn in the ear is the perfection and complete growth of which the seed is capable. Others tell us that the blade signifies those who by faith and fear give up evil things, the ear those who rise higher and higher by love of eternal things, and the corn in the ear represents those who are perfect and full-grown in

charity. Or again, as St. Gregory says, good desires are the casting of the seed into the earth, the beginning of good works is the blade, proficiency in them is the ear, and perfection in them is the full corn. And once more, they see in this gradual growth, as described by our Lord, a warning against the imprudence which aims at doing everything at once, and at working the works of the higher stages of the spiritual life, before we have made ourselves familiar with those which belong to the lower.

There is yet another manner of understanding this parable and its application which has much to recommend it, on account of its position in the series of these first parables descriptive of the Kingdom of God. According to this method of interpretation, our Lord has before His mind, not so much the working of the Divine seed of the Word of God in soul after soul, individually, as the progress and accomplishment of the great work of the Church in the world as a power and a kingdom. This interpretation begins by supposing that our Lord Himself is the Sower in the first instance, and that He goes away, as is said in the parable, and leaves the seed to work of itself. Not that our Lord is ever absent from the Church, for He has promised to be with her even to the consummation of the world, but that His visible presence is withdrawn, and He leaves the work which He Himself began, to be carried on and perfected by others, under His own continual guidance and protection. And then, at the end of time, He is to come again. "When the fruit is brought forth, immediately He putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." These last words have not so plain a meaning in

those interpretations of the parable in which the sower is the minister of the Word or the ordinary Christian, for with them, in many cases, the harvest never comes in this world, and it is the principle of the Kingdom, so to say, as our Lord has expressed it elsewhere, that one soweth and another reapeth. The word of truth or grace which is sown by one comes up at last to be gathered in as it were by another, when the first labourer is in his grave. It is not of course impossible to explain the reaping in that sense of which the former interpretations are the result. For the words may be understood of the evangelical preacher or labourer, who continues the work he has begun, by receiving the sinner to penance, or the converted unbeliever to baptism, or the heretic to the unity of the Church, or the dying man to the full privileges of the Christian death-bed. And our Lord's words may be an expression of the joy of heart of such as have this blessing, of seeing at last, after many labours and long delays, the fruit of all their toil.

But the words seem most naturally to refer to that accomplishment of the work of the Divine Word in the world at large, which will be the occasion for the Second Coming of the Son of God, when the number of the elect is accomplished and the truth has been witnessed to over the whole world, when every nation has had its trial, and the full course of the great counsel of God with the human race has worked itself out. Then at last will the harvest be, the last persecution will be over, the evil one finally conquered, the regeneration of all things at hand, the creation itself to share in the glorification of the sons of God in soul and body, in

the new heavens and the new earth in which justice dwells. And in this sense the parable before us forms the best possible introduction to the others which immediately follow it, in which the Kingdom of Heaven is described, first as a grain of mustard seed cast into the ground, which grows up and becomes a great tree and spreads out its branches for the fowls of the air to take shelter in, and in which the progress of the Kingdom to so high a state of external magnificence and influence is described. And then the same progress is compared to the gradual leavening of a large mass of meal with a small quantity of leaven. In this way our Lord first of all, in the present parable, describes the patient growth of the Church until the harvest. Then He speaks of its visible magnificence and imposing presence in the world, under the image of the mustard seed, and lastly of the method of its assimilation to itself of the society into which it was sent forth, under the image of the leaven.

CHAPTER V.

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED.

St. Matt. xiii. 31, 32; St. Mark iv. 30—32; *Story of the Gospels*, § 60.

THE two parables which follow in order on that of the Seed growing of itself, are so placed by the two first Evangelists, who alone relate them, as to make it appear that they were delivered, if not at the same time, at least to the same audience, as those which have been already examined by us. For the account of them is followed by the declaration of the Evangelists that our Lord spoke these things and other things to the people in parables as they were able to bear them, and that without parables He did not speak to them. There are yet, as we shall see, three others, which belong to this time, but as to which we are not told that they were uttered to the people, and are rather led to think that they were addressed to the disciples only. Our present business is with the first of the two, as to which it is undoubted that they were addressed to the multitudes.

“Another parable He proposcd to them, and He said, To what shall we liken the Kingdom of Heaven? and to what parable shall we compare it? It is like to a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field, which when it is in the earth, is less than all the seeds

that are in the earth, the least of all seeds, and when it is grown, it groweth up and becometh greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree, and shooteth out great branches, so that the birds of the air come and dwell in the branches under the shadow thereof."

The points of the comparison are easily seized. The seed sown is very small, chiefly in comparison with the bulk which it attains, for there may be other seeds actually not larger than that which is spoken of. It grows up to a size and height quite out of proportion, and becomes, although not a large tree among trees, still larger than others of the same class to which it belongs, so as to be a tree rather than a herb. It puts out branches, and in these branches and under its shade the birds of the air are content to dwell. Thus this parable may be said, as has been the case with others, to spring out of the preceding parable. There our Lord had dwelt on the marvellous power of fructification possessed by the seed of corn, when it was once deposited in the ground, a power which it displayed without the labour of the sower, owing it only to its own innate vigour and to the elements in the earth and other circumstances which make it fruitful. Now our Lord passes on to another comparison, and it is no longer the seed of corn that springs up as if the earth brought forth of itself, first the blade, then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear. Another image is required to set forth the magnitude which is attained by the growth of the spiritual seed, and this image is to be that of a seed which becomes at last nothing less than a tree, larger than the rest of its class, and capable of giving shelter to the fowls of the air. In the former parable the point was that

the seed should grow at all by virtue of its own powers, and in this the point is the size and magnitude which it attains and the shelter which it affords.

The first question raised as to this parable is that which relates to the image here used by our Lord. It is not quite certain that the plant of which He speaks is that which we now call the mustard plant, and which in these countries we are not accustomed to see growing to any great size. It seems of little importance whether we can exactly identify the plant, and there is in the East a plant called Khardal, which is said to resemble mustard in everything, and to be considerably larger in growth. But the most simple explanation seems to be that the plant is what we call mustard, but that in the East, and in other warmer countries than our own, it reaches a much larger size than among ourselves. Maldonatus says that in Spain its branches are used for heating ovens, and that flocks of birds collect in its boughs without breaking them down. There are other similar statements which seem to take away all difficulty as to the interpretation of the image. Our Lord, as has been said, does not choose this particular plant to represent the Church or the Kingdom of Heaven because there are no trees of larger size, but because in this particular case the seed is very small, and the growth very large in comparison. There are plenty of instances in Sacred Scripture in which the image of a tree is applied to a kingdom, as in the dream of Nabuchodonosor, and in the description of the Assyrian Empire in the Book of Ezechiel.¹ But the

¹ Ezechiel xxxi. 3—9.

trees there spoken of are larger and more magnificent, and it cannot be doubted that, with these images before Him, our Lord deliberately altered the particulars so as to make His tree a mustard tree.

It is also asked whether we may consider that the use made of the mustard tree in particular by our Lord is meant to set us considering what are the peculiar qualities of this plant, in contrast to others, and outside the special point of the smallness of the seed in comparison to the growth. Are we to endeavour to find in them some correspondence with the special characteristics of the Kingdom of Heaven to which it is compared? There are several passages in various Fathers in which this idea is followed out, and it can hardly be fanciful to think that the principle on which these commentaries are founded is legitimate, if not certainly true. Thus the mustard seed is said, in a sermon attributed to St. Ambrose, to be small and of little value, to have no savour or odour which attracts and pleases, to require crushing or pounding before it gives out its taste, and then to show its pungent and biting qualities, to burn and sting like no other plant of the same order, as if a great power of fire had been enclosed in its small compass. In these qualities some of the Christian writers have seen the humility and insignificance, whether of the Gospel teaching itself, or of the means of grace, the powers of the Word, though set forth by humble instruments, and the burning and stinging effects of grace on the soul which receives it into itself, having been accustomed to the softness and unwholesome sweetness of the world, the languor and torpor of sensuality, the smooth deceits of the effeminate life, and the like.

There can be no difficulty in following out this line of interpretation, and there is no reason for thinking that our Lord may not have had the qualities of the mustard seed before His mind, when He spoke this parable. But the main point of the similitude seems to be that of the size and importance to which the mustard plant grows, having begun from so small a seed. Thus it would seem also that our Lord is directly pointing to the space which the Church would fill in the world, or, again, to the manner in which the influences of grace would fill the life of the soul and engross all its energies. The Church itself was, when He left it at His Ascension, but an almost imperceptible germ in the midst of the great human society. Its numbers were very small, its members were altogether without influence, station, repute, and power. An enemy of our Lord, such as Caiaphas or Annas, might have said to himself, within a few days of Pentecost, that the evil seed sown by the Nazarene Prophet had been indeed trampled under foot. Even the beginnings of the Church attracted little notice, at first, from those watchful foes who had brought about the death of our Lord, and it was thought by them sufficient, when their attention was at last aroused, to scourge the Apostles and forbid them to teach in the Name of the Lord. It was in their sight a thing insignificant in itself, and one of which there was no reason to fear the success. It did not appear to have any vitality, or any considerable inherent power of spreading itself and gaining a hold on the world. What was there in it to promise anything of the kind?

And so also there was nothing about the Church

to attract the attention or raise the alarm of the politicians around the throne of the Cæsars at Rome. The Parthians or the Germans or the Dacians on the borders of the Empire, gave them ten times the amount of anxiety. A revolt of the Gauls or a sedition in Alexandria was far more in their eyes than the preaching and miracles of the whole Apostolic band. The religion of the Christ was not worth meeting on its own ground, the ground of argument. It was quite sufficient to treat it as a detestable and unreasonable superstition, and drown it in the blood of its fanatical adherents, who were in their proper place as the prey of the wild beasts of the amphitheatre. Even while it was gradually filling the world and conquering silently all the better parts of the pagan society, it was still contemptible. It had no men of mind, no famous rhetoricians, no generals, no claimants to the purple. But at last it came to fill the sky and its greatness could not be questioned, and then the powers of the world and the rulers of the nations began to discover in the Church an influence which might afford a shelter and a sustaining protection for themselves. They began to see how the Church made men the best citizens in this life as well as the heirs of the life to come, how law had no foundation so secure as conscience, how the public service was never so safe as in the hands of those who sought a heavenly kingdom, how all that is good and noble and fruitful, in the natural order, was fostered and developed and magnified and endowed with a new life, by the breath of the Divine Spirit of the Kingdom of the Incarnation, how philosophy became fixed and

rooted in immutable and unquestionable truth, how science received fresh wings to soar to Heaven, and fresh keenness of perception to unlock the treasures and the secrets of nature, how art became heavenly, instead of the reflection of the lower passions, how the world, the inheritance of man, was laid open to him at last to enter and take possession of it, and how the civilization and elevation of the whole race into one great and enlightened brotherhood became no longer an impossible dream.

All these truths are included under those simple words of our Lord, that "the fowls of the air came to dwell in the branches thereof." It may well be that the powers of the Church for the enlightenment and elevation of mankind in the natural order have never as yet been fully developed, and that the future history of the world may proceed on the same lines as that of the last centuries, in which the Church has been losing rather than gaining on the allegiance of the nations, which is the necessary condition of the accomplishment of this work. But our Lord speaks of results that have been fulfilled, though they might have been more gloriously fulfilled than they have been. He does not use the whole glowing language of the evangelical prophet, for in the prophecies of the latter there are more lofty things said concerning the dominion of the Church than are contained in the comparatively modest image of the mustard tree. Indeed, this contrast is remarkable between the language of the prophetic passages which our Lord must have had in His mind, as He uses in some particulars the very words of those prophets, and His own humble prediction, for prediction it is, concerning His

Kingdom. He seems to tell us that the Church is to be conspicuous for its wonderful growth and also for its protective power. But He does not say that that growth shall fill the whole world, nor that the whole natural order of society shall take refuge under its shade. Ezechiel had said, in describing the ultimate glories of the Church, "I myself will take of the marrow of the high cedar and will set it; I will crop off a tender twig from the top of the branches thereof, and I will plant it on a mountain high and eminent. On the high mountains of Israel will I plant it, and it shall shoot forth into branches and shall bear fruit and it shall become a great cedar, and all birds shall dwell under it, and every fowl shall make its nest under the shadow of the branches thereof."² There is His own humility in the way in which our Lord has adapted this image to the circumstances of the history of the Church. But, on the other hand, looking back to that history as it has unfolded itself, before angels and men, during nineteen centuries, we cannot fail to be struck with the exactness of the fulfilment of the prediction of our Lord, modified as it is from the more glowing language of His Prophet.

What is true of the history of the Church in the accomplishment of its work, is also by a kind of necessity true of the working of Divine grace in the single individual soul. It may not only most truly be said, that the unhindered working of grace in any single heart produces immense results, out of all proportion to its beginnings. This may be seen in considering the work of sanctification in a soul such as that of St. Paul or St. Mary Magdalene.

² Ezechiel xvii. 22, 23.

It is also true that there is in such cases something which may be considered as answering to the result of which our Lord speaks, when He says that the fowls of the air take refuge in the branches of the mustard tree. In itself, the progress of a soul to perfection, as far as that progress can be traced as ordinarily following any general law, is a work and a growth of very great magnitude in the moral and spiritual order. The seed that is first sown is the love of God or the desire of His grace and friendship in some way or degree, whether it takes the form of a flight from the miseries of the world and of a life of sin, or of that desire of higher things which our Lord wished to arouse in the heart of the rich young man, when He bade him, after keeping the commandments from his youth up, to go and sell what he had and give to the poor and come, follow Him. It is a great thing, that earnest and vigorous turning away from past sins in confession and contrition, with which the process of the purgation of the soul is commenced. It is a great thing, that holy self-hatred in which those who are to be led on to perfection fly from the occasions of sin, as St. Peter did when he went out and wept bitterly, and which vents itself in the affliction of the body, as the instrument of sin, in the penances of the saints of which we read so much as the first step in their conversion. This work of satisfaction is a great triumph over nature, the severe poverty, the abandonment of earthly goods, the seeking for contempt, the vengeance on themselves to which they are so often guided. This self-affliction lasts often more or less in various degrees during their whole life, though bodily infirmities, or other causes

of prudence, may interfere in regulating its measure. The saints have not only to get rid of their sins and of the penalties of their sins in confession. They have to root out the bad habits which have fastened themselves on the souls as weeds upon the soil of some neglected garden. The long list of the seven deadly sins and their children, as they are called by spiritual writers, remains for perfect extirpation and conquest, evil roots ever ready to spring up, the moment the watchfulness of self-discipline is relaxed. Then comes the equally long and arduous process of the subjugation of the affections and passions, the concupiscent and irascible principles in the soul, which are not to be exterminated like the seeds of vice, but to be reduced to proper order and rule, so as to be useful under the guidance of mortification, until the firm peace of the interior kingdom is established.

This peace requires the long, but the blessed and happy labour, of the planting in of the Christian virtues after the example of our Lord, humility, the contempt of the world, human honour and glory, the willing subjection of themselves to others, obedience, ready to undertake any toils and exertions which may be enjoined upon it, the abnegation of self-will and judgment, the love of suffering, patience, readiness under contumely, joy in adversity and humiliation after the pattern of Christ in His Passion, the perfect practice of purity, the banishing of sensual images and thoughts from the soul, which is gradually taken possession of even as to its imaginations and fancies by the spirit of holy devotion, and the representations which belong to it. This region of the virtues is a glorious world, into

which the love of God and of perfection leads the soul. And it soon becomes aware that there is nothing which can put it in possession of this new Kingdom but the life of prayer, as the same life is also the surest weapon for the conquest of the passions and the acquisition of interior peace.

A soul thus occupied by the spirit of prayer is raised, in one sense, to a heavenly life. But in another the world is laid open to it as a matter of study and anxiety, because it becomes sensible of the vast range covered by the interests of God and the work of our Lord in the world around it. Contemplation opens to such a soul the miseries of the world, the whole series of the Life and actions of our Lord, the beauties of the souls of His Blessed Mother and of the Saints, the benefits by which God has enriched His creatures, the Divine perfections, and the mysteries hidden in the Sacred Scriptures. Such a soul is moved to weep over the blindness of men, the miseries and calamities of which sin is the parent, its own daily defects and past offences. It is kindled with fresh desire for virtue, it learns the power of the intercession of our Blessed Lady and of the Saints of God, it rejoices in the union with God which it is already allowed to attain, it pours itself out in prayer for the conversion of sinners and unbelievers, and the exaltation of the Name of God. It finds a holy joy in the perfection with which that Name is already honoured by the good, it melts in praise of His majesty and glory, it closes more and more entirely with His will in all things regarding itself and others, and becomes more and more altogether one with Him.

A soul that has learnt to live in prayer, after

passing through the stages already enumerated, is indeed a plant, in the garden of the Lord, of marvellous growth and magnificence. It may require the eye of Heaven to discern all its beauties, and so far it may not perfectly answer to the image which is here used by our Lord, which seems to be in the main an image of external growth. But the development of the holy seed in it completely corresponds to the words of the parable. The mind is pure, if not from all slight defects, at least from wilful and serious irregularities. The casting away of temporal things is complete, for the heart is filled with the untold treasures of the spiritual world, and to such a heart there is no room for the love of the things of this world. The appetites are reduced to peace under the rule of charity. The tongue has been tamed to perfect circumspection. The thoughts are well-ordered, all pure and clean, not simply from the foul images and desires of the lowest appetites, but even from all that is idle and vain, frivolous and inordinate, unworthy of the eye of God. The desires are indeed impatient with a holy impatience, longing for the works and the services of the children of God with an eagerness which surpasses in intensity and force the ambition of the worldling, the craving for greed of the avaricious, the sensual yearnings of the voluptuary, and the baneful desires of revenge which torment the hearts in which hatreds and animosities reign. In such souls as these all the works are beautiful, not only in aim and intention, in substance and in character, but in completeness and integrity, in the absence of all flaw and inattention and wavering or uncertainty of purpose, of all self-complacency

or vanity to mar them after they are accomplished. In such souls, moreover, there is not only the robust activity which issues in the whole range of virtues, as opportunity for exertion is afforded. There is also the patient endurance of adversity and hardship, the joy in tribulation and trial, the constancy in the midst of the fires of temptation, which mark the consummate perfection of the imitators of our Lord. In them indeed the grain of mustard seed, to revert to the original image used in this parable, reveals its qualities when crushed and beaten down. Such men "possess their souls in patience," as our Lord elsewhere says, and their gentleness and sweetness are most fully manifested under the sharp trials of persecution, and the perpetual friction of the imperfections of those among whom they live.

It is needless to speak of the other internal perfections which grow out of the full work of grace in these perfect souls, the manner in which their charity binds all their faculties to a continual occupation on their one best object, that is on God, how their will is so united to His as to be moved by it as the limbs of the body are moved by the soul, how they are, in the sense in which the Apostle speaks, transformed into God, nailed together with Christ to the Cross, so that not they live, but Christ liveth in them. But these thoughts are enough to show how large and powerful and fruitful is the growth of grace in the faithful soul, which opposes no hindrance to the work of God within it. It indeed becomes a great tree, and fills the wide heaven of the soul in which God has chosen to dwell. And if we are to seek, in this application also of the parable, for something which may answer to the

latter part of our Lord's description, when He says that the birds of the air come and make their nests in the branches of this blessed tree, we may find this in a two-fold consideration. In the first place, the process of sanctification and of growth in perfection of which we have been speaking, affects indeed directly the spiritual faculties and the moral life of the soul, but it has also its most precious though indirect effects on the intellectual and mental faculties also. It perfects the will, it develops the mind, it regulates and trains the imagination to flights and achievements for which it would otherwise have no capacity. The whole man is ennobled and elevated, he is more truly a man, made after the image of God. Just as vice degrades and enfeebles and endarkens and lowers and makes childlike, even the men who are most wonderfully gifted with intellectual endowments, so does union with God and the constant presence of His grace, acting on the soul, raise men above the tottering and stammering and dreamy and purposeless imbecility in which the life of worldliness and pleasure consists. That life has its cruel and malignant side, for it is essentially the worship of self. But, measured by an intellectual standard only, it is the life of the lower animals led by beings who are the heirs of His Heavenly Kingdom, and yet who never rise to the level of their gifts and destinies, any more than the children who die in the cradle, or the idiots who grin and chatter throughout a life, long in years, which yet can never be truly called a life.

And again, in another sense, there is a grand result of the growth of perfection in a single soul

which benefits others, and which therefore may be considered as a fulfilment of this part of our Lord's parable. For no one is good and virtuous and holy and perfect in his union with God and in the ripe maturity of His spiritual gifts, who is not of immense service to all around him. The interior peace and light and strength of these pure souls fall on those who come across them, in patience, and meekness, and charity, in wise and holy counsels, in bright examples, breathing courage and hope on all who see them, and in the power of a lifelong prayer. The saints are the true supports of the world, the guides of the ignorant, the beacons of the wanderer, the comfort of the lonely and broken-hearted. Their wisdom leads the Church in her pilgrimage, their prayers are the strength and the light of the champions of the faith.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN.

St. Matt. xiii. 33; *Story of the Gospels*, § 60.

THE two Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, which appear to have been the last of this series which were delivered to the people by our Lord, are supplementary the one to the other. It seems as if our Lord had intended to set forth two great truths concerning His Church, the Kingdom of the Incarnation, and the working of the Gospel grace in the world, and had chosen two separate images, one for each of these great truths. We have already spoken of the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Although that parable admits of more than one interpretation, it seems most directly intended to foreshadow the large space which the Church was to occupy in the world, the extent of her dominion, and the large range of her influence over things which do not exactly belong to or form part of her. An image of this kind might be applied to any large visible kingdom or institution in the world. It might be applied to an Empire such as that of Rome or England, it might be applied to the religion of Mahomet or of Buddha. But there was something peculiar to the Gospel Kingdom which was not to be found in any other, and which

could not be so well expressed in the image of the grain of mustard seed. This is the assimilating and transforming power of the Gospel truths, which work within the minds and hearts of those who receive them, to such an extent as to make this interior process the characteristic means by which the Church was to attain her great power and influence in the world. This was something altogether different from the growth of a small seed into a large tree. Many important truths concerning the Gospel were folded up in this figure, and our Lord therefore subjoins it immediately to the other, contained in the Parable of the Mustard Seed.

“Another parable He spoke to them. The Kingdom of Heaven is like to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened.”

The image here set forth is one of the change of a large mass, without any external alteration in its shape or form, and without the application to it of any power from without. The meal remains meal, but it has been penetrated by a new influence, which has affected every particle of it. Nothing has been destroyed, nothing has been removed, no new element has been introduced which constitutes a fresh and independent substance or portion. The leaven is in the whole mass, and in every atom of it. It has been absorbed, or it has changed the quality of every part to which it has penetrated, and it has penetrated the whole. It has lost, so to say, its independent existence, and in exchange for that it has qualified all around it.

It is natural that the Christian commentators should have found particular applications for every single word of this short parable. A man takes the

mustard seed, and plants it in his garden. A woman takes the leaven, and hides it in three measures of meal. Each sex therefore has its share in the work of God in the Gospel Kingdom. The woman is either our Blessed Lady or the Church, or the preaching of the Word. Our Lord, or the knowledge of our Lord, is the leaven. Our Lord is full of the fervour of charity, He is burning with the desire of drawing all to Himself, especially those who labour and are heavily burthened, He has filled the whole earth with His knowledge, He has raised our nature to Heaven, He has drawn the hearts of men from earthly things to things celestial, from perishable goods to eternal, and so He has made us pleasant and tasteful to God, whereas we had before been like the accursed dust which the serpent was condemned to eat. We are capable of pleasing God by our faith, of gaining His commendation by our works, and by the same earning from Him eternal rewards. Our Blessed Lady was the first to receive this Divine leaven, and in this she was prefigured by Sara, to whom Abraham said, when he received the visit of the Angels, "Make haste, temper together three measures of flour, and make cakes upon the hearth."¹ First in her heart, and then in her pure womb, she received this leaven. The Divine Word, the Soul of Jesus, and His Body, were there commingled or united. St. Bernard may give us a specimen of this method of application. "Here you have," he says, "three kinds of power. That which was not, is created, that is, the soul. That which had perished, was repaired, that is, the flesh. That which is above all, is made a little lower

¹ Gen. xviii. 6.

than the Angels. These are the three measures of meal in the Gospel which are leavened that they may become the Bread of Angels, of which man may eat, the Bread that strengtheneth man's heart. Happy that woman, blessed among women, in whose chaste womb this Bread is prepared, the fire of the Holy Ghost coming upon her. Happy, I say, that woman, who into these three measures of meal hath put the leaven of her faith, since by faith she conceived, by faith she brought forth.”² Then again, we are told of the spread of this leaven. Our Blessed Lady was first of all leavened, and then she sped at once into the mountain parts of Judæa, that St. John Baptist and his parents, Zachary and Elisabeth, might be leavened also. The voice of her salutation filled them with the Holy Ghost, and made them prophets. Then St. John began to collect disciples, and by preaching and baptism to prepare them for Christ. Then our Lord drew to Himself the Apostles, by means of whom He leavened the whole world.

Other Fathers draw out this point, of the communication of the leavening power to those who are already themselves leavened. St. Ambrose tells us that whoever has joined himself to the leaven of Christ, becomes leaven himself, not only useful to himself, but profitable to all. He is secure of His own salvation, and also that he will gain others. But this must be at a certain cost. The leaven that is to be spread throughout the mass of meal must be as it were broken, crushed, scattered, and must lose its own cohesion, in order that it may bind into one mass the whole quantity of meal,

² St. Bernard, *Serm. de tribus mixturis.*

make it into one body, having been before only a heap of particles, without body or solidity. So also our Lord, Who is the leaven of the world, is broken, torn, and crushed to pieces by various sufferings. His Blood is shed that it may be the cause of the binding together of the whole race of men into one, whereas before that there was no cohesion between them. Something of the same kind must happen to all who are to be, in their turn, leaven to others. Thus the Apostles, who became the leaven of the world after the Day of Pentecost, were a few unknown, persecuted, afflicted men, who yet had the power, by the sacrifice of themselves, to raise men from earthly to heavenly things, and make them acceptable to God.

To others the woman is the Divine Wisdom by which the whole dispensation of the Gospel Kingdom is arranged. The three measures of meal are the three continents known to antiquity, or the three races of men descended from the sons of Noe, or the three Laws, the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Evangelical, in all of which it was possible to gain and use profitably the grace of God. The chief point of the parable seems to lie, not in the circumstances of the application of the leaven, but in the manner itself in which the leaven works, and in the effects which it produces. This image first of all teaches us that the action of grace, whether in the individual soul or in society, is nothing violent, nothing destructive, nothing subversive. Grace finds, so to say, a congenial soil in the soul of man, and it does not eject or cut down any part of our nature. In the action of the Church on society the same truth is remarkably evident. The Church takes

human nature and human society as she finds them. In their origin both are Divine works, and there is no essential element in them that is bad. The Church takes the family, the community, the State, and qualifies them by her own Divine power for the ends for which they were originally established. So it was historically. She worked from within, using personal influence and example and communication as her great human instruments, rather than preaching to large masses, which was impossible, or the power of literature, in which she had few very great champions in the earlier centuries. The same process is always going on in the gaining of souls to God, whether it be to a higher life, a more perfect observance of the precepts, the embracing of the Evangelical counsels, or, again, the conversion of heretics and schismatics and unbelievers.

The natural principle, therefore, on which all action of this kind rests, is the similarity or congeniality between the influence or the person which acts as leaven, and the substance or the person on which it so acts. No amount of such influence can make a substance into another substance altogether different, as a stone into bread, or wood into flesh. The leaven fastens on that which is kindred to itself and so open to its influence. Thus the Church has never conquered a nation or a community, as it were, from without. She has gathered up all the fragments of truth that were scattered over the world, disengaged them from the coating or setting of error in which they were imbedded, brought them together, arranged them in harmony, and so she has given life to each particle and to the whole system in which they have naturally coalesced under her

benign influence. In the application of this principle of her action, which is so beautifully illustrated by some of her early writers, who had to deal with the heathen systems of religion, philosophy, and social life, lies the secret of the success of the Apostolical work, especially that part of it which is devoted to the reduction of heretics and the conversion of nations who have never before heard of the Church. In all false systems—and every soul of man with whom the Apostolical worker has to deal has a system, so to call it, of his own—in all such systems there is a grain of truth, probably many large fragments. There is a point in the intellectual road up to which the false system simply follows the true, and after which it diverges from it. The process of persuasion must begin from this point, and when men's faces are once set in the right direction instead of the wrong, the path of error is left farther and farther aside as the onward march proceeds. The whole of the doctrine taught by the most prudent and experienced saints for the reclaiming of sinners by persuasion, is summed up for us by our Lord Himself in a few words in this Parable of the Leaven. There we have the most perfect picture, in all the series of these parables, of the power of personal contact and intercourse, and of the manner in which our opportunities of these are to be made profitable, by fastening on what is already good and true in the souls of those who are in error, or in rebellion against the law of God.

It is curious, as has been noticed by some writers, that the image of leaven is often used in Scripture for something bad, rather than for something good. These writers, some of whom have been enemies

of the Church, have seen in this parable a kind of prophecy of the many evils which, as they suppose, have been introduced into her system, ending, in the opinion of these heretics, in the entire corruption of her body. If it were necessary to refute such strange doctrines, an answer to them would be found in the words of our Lord, Who is speaking here also of the Kingdom of God. But the truth is that the image of the leaven is in itself one capable of a two-fold interpretation, for it may express the manner in which either truth or evil, either what is good or what is bad, may be propagated and spread. Besides this, the image had a peculiar significance to the holy people, on account of the injunction to put away all leaven at the time of the great feast of the Pasch, in commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt, an injunction which was always observed, and which was connected with a special ceremony in every household at the time when the Paschal Supper was celebrated. With regard to the image itself, it is quite clear that evil as well as good may be communicated in this way, although there is a sense in which it may be said that evil and falsehood are never congenial to the human soul and mind, in the same way that goodness and truth are congenial thereto. All evil and all falsehood are perversions, distortions, corruptions, and such things have not the natural force of consistent and systematic growth. But, as a matter of experience, the evil which follows from contact with evil is as rapid and extensive in its propagation, as the good which is communicated by the intercourse with the good.

We have the authority of our Lord and St. Paul

for this use of the image, and we may consider their use of it in an evil sense as conveying to ourselves a salutary warning. There are three leavens mentioned by our Lord, against which, at various times, He warned, not the people only, but also the Apostles. Not long after the delivery of these parables, He warned the disciples to take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. In the account of the same incident in St. Mark, it is said that He mentioned the leaven of Herod. At a later period of His preaching, St. Luke tells us, that when great multitudes stood about Him, so that they stood one upon another, He began to say to His disciples, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.³ Here we have three kinds of evil, one of which is interpreted to us by our Lord as hypocrisy. That was the leaven of the Pharisees, a leaven to which the teachers of any religion are liable, especially when the people flock to their ministrations. This leaven begins to work, as soon as ever our practice becomes inconsistent with our profession, as soon as ever our acts of religion become devoid of the spirit which ought to animate them. This is, in truth, a leaven, a mischief which gradually spreads over the whole life, destroying prayer, piety, devotion, energy in good, hopefulness, trust in, and familiarity with, God, and opening the door to every vice, according to the temptations to which any soul may be exposed. There may have been a possibility of this leaven beginning to work, even among the Apostles, at the time when our Lord warned them. And if it was so with them, how can any one, however

³ St. Matt. xvi. 6; St. Mark viii. 15; St. Luke xii. 1.

deeply engaged in the service of God, hope to be free from it?

The other leavens our Lord does not name, but by characterizing them as the leavens of Herod and of the Sadducees, He seems to point to the danger of worldliness in the one case, and of self-indulgence and sensuality in the other. The leaven begins by small encroachments in every case, and it had probably already begun to work in the soul of Judas, one of the Apostolic band, who was nevertheless infected with that amount of worldliness which is involved in fondness for money. This vice may be concealed under the most holy appearances, and it may begin by the simple but excessive eagerness for money for good works, or the maintenance of those who are working for God. Worldliness is always accompanied by selfishness, and thus the latter, in the most subtle forms, is a sure sign of the presence of the former in the soul. Thus we often see persons who are engaged in good works, active and unscrupulous in outrunning and outwitting others who are similarly occupied. There is not merely an honourable emulation in the service of God. There is a positive ambition to be first and to stand forward as the most successful in the public eye. Then, to secure this kind of success, that men may obtain for themselves the best opportunities of distinction, and the like, there is often a pettiness and a meanness in scheming for such objects of which even worldlings would be ashamed, and which they are very quick in detecting when those who profess not to be worldlings are so foolish as to use them. Indeed, worldliness in the sanctuary is one of the greatest evils that can infect the

Church, a mischief which may often work more fatally than some grosser sins. This may be considered as the leaven of Herod.

It remains to say a few words on what our Lord may have meant by the leaven of the Sadducees. The Sadducees were the materialists of their day, the men who cut down the range of certain truths to the lowest possible standards. Their doctrines led them, as it seems, directly to a disregard of the sanctions of the moral law, by destroying the entire belief in the future existence of the soul, or indeed, in its existence independently of the body. But it must not be supposed that the Sadducees made any open profession of these consequences of their own principles. For such a profession would have ruined their credit in the eyes of the people. But it is most likely that their lives were in accordance with their opinions, and if these did not lead them to an open disregard of the moral law and of conscience, at all events they must have opposed a very feeble barrier against practical self-indulgence, and the indolent pursuit of comfort and ease of every kind that was not reprobated by public opinion. It is not easy to see how any Christians can hold the opinions of the Sadducees. But it is a matter of daily experience that many lives may be practically guided by principles no higher than theirs, as soon as the habit and spirit of prayer have died away. If our Lord thought it well to warn the Apostles against this leaven also, it cannot be supposed that it is a light danger, or a danger which can only assail men of very little faith. When St. Paul used this image to the Corinthians, he was remonstrating with them most severely upon their toleration of

open, excessive, and enormous license in the matter of impurity. "Know you not," he said, "that a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump? Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste, as you are unleavened."⁴ This is enough to show that there may be a great danger of the spread of this last-named leaven, even among Christians. And this danger may be particularly rife in ages of luxury, refinement, material progress, when ancient severity is laid aside, even by those who very frequently approach the sacraments, and the prevalence of a certain kind of culture serves as a disguise for a large amount of softness and effeminacy. Constant efforts are now made, in the most Christian countries in the world, to bring back the state of social corruption in the midst of which the Corinthians lived, and from which they had just been dragged by their great Apostle. These efforts are most forcibly aided by the prevalence of sceptical and material views in philosophy and religion. To say this is almost the same thing as to say that we live in a society in which the leaven of the Sadducees is actively at work.

⁴ 1 Cor. v. 6, 7.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PARABLES OF THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL.

St. Matt. xiii. 44—46; *Story of the Gospels*, § 62.

Two things might have been expected, in the case of the parabolic teaching of our Lord. The first of these would be that, after having proposed His parables to the people, in the presence of His disciples, He should explain to the latter, as far as He deemed it necessary, that meaning of the instructions which was more or less veiled from His ordinary hearers. He did not do this in all cases, as far as we can gather from the Evangelists. It was more in accordance with His usual method with souls, that He should furnish the Apostles with just sufficient guidance as to the meaning of particular parables, and as to the general principles in accordance with which they were to be interpreted. He always left a great deal to the process of consideration, reflection, meditation, the comparison of one truth and one statement with other truths and other statements. This process was always going on in the minds of His attentive and faithful followers, who were thus led on by the silent teaching of His Father. They were students in His school, not simply hearers and learners, and He preferred, as He always prefers, this method for the mastering

of the truths which it is His desire to see deeply rooted in souls. This was the process by which our Blessed Lady was ever more and more illuminated, although to her the mysteries and the truths of the Kingdom must have been made manifest with the utmost freedom and largeness of revelation. There is much that is analogous to this in the gradual unfolding of the treasures of doctrine which our Lord committed, once for all, to His Church. He has preferred that their fuller exposition, according to the needs of successive generations, should be the work of the Christian Doctorate under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, rather than that every single detail and item should have been written down from the beginning. The office of the Holy Ghost, the ever-living authority of the Church, the ministrations of the different orders of her heaven-gifted children and servants, are thus provided for in His Kingdom. We have already noted that our Lord did not give even those explanations of the parables which we possess, without expressing some surprise, almost some disappointment, that the Apostles had not, of themselves, penetrated His meaning. We may suppose that these blessed companions of His gathered so much light from the explanation of the Parables of the Sower and of the Cockle, as to be easily able to understand the remaining parables without special explanation.

Another thing which we might expect to find in the Gospel accounts of this great series of instructions, would be that there were certain points of doctrine thus conveyed, which might be addressed to the Apostles alone, and not also to the people.

In any system of Divine truth such as that conveyed in the parables of the first series, it is natural to expect that there should be some truths altogether reserved for a time, as well as some truths set forth to the multitude in a manner which would render them intelligible only to the studious and diligent hearers. It is not, therefore, surprising, if we find that the three last parables of the series before us, of which it now remains to speak, seem not to have been delivered to the people at all, but only to the Apostles.

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field, which a man having found, hid it, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a merchant, seeking good pearls. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

These two parables have so much in common, that it may be well to take them together. There is a difference, indeed a kind of contrast, between them on one or two points, but the similarity is greater than the difference, and the subject-matter of each is the same.

Before, however, we examine the parables in themselves, it may be well to point out the manner in which they are contrasted to the series which had preceded them. In the former parables, then, the work of God in the Church, in the preaching of the Word, in the spreading of the truth throughout the world, in the conversion and sanctification of the individual soul, had been spoken of as an enterprise or undertaking proceeding according to the usual laws of nature. As to the recipients of the

Word or the seed, the process seems almost impersonal. We know that in the case of those who are like the seed by the wayside, or like the seed cast on stony ground, or in the midst of thorns, or again, of those who are as the cockle, the result of fruitfulness or sterility does actually depend very mainly on the will and choice of each single soul. Those who are as the seed on the good soil, those who are the growth of the good seed in the midst of which the cockle is oversown, are what they are by their own faithful cooperation with the grace of God and the opportunities afforded to them by His Providence. Yet the descriptions in the parables almost ignore this truth. Our Lord is more intent on tracing the action of His Father and Himself. In the same way, He speaks of the seed springing up of itself while men sleep, He speaks of the grain of mustard seed sown in the field, and of the leaven put into the measure of meal by the woman. Not much has hitherto been said of the human side in the good growth, of the readiness or eagerness to hear, of the desires of grace, the thirst for peace with God, the burning fire of longing for the Kingdom of Heaven. Nothing has even been said of that hunger and thirst for our salvation and beatification which was the moving power of His own Life, nothing of the love of God for souls which made Him give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believe in Him may not perish, but have everlasting life. We are told indeed of the prospect of the harvest in the case of the householder in the Parable of the Cockle, and of the time when the sickle is put forth in the Parable of the Seed. But this other side of the picture is now made the prominent

feature, and this constitutes the main point of contrast between these and the former parables.

The Kingdom of Heaven, in these two parables, is represented as the motive of great sacrifices, whether on the part of the man who has found the treasure, or of him who has found the one valuable pearl. It may, indeed, be doubted whether, in the language in which our Lord spoke, the words would not go beyond the more limited meaning of the Greek, in which, if it be strictly taken, the Kingdom of Heaven is first likened to the treasure, and not to the finder of the treasure, and then not to the pearl, but to the merchant. It seems more easy and more accurate to understand the words as a simple declaration, that in the Kingdom of Heaven certain things take place which resemble, in the first place, the action of the finder of the treasure, and in the second place, the action of the finder of the pearl. So it seems to be in other comparisons of our Lord, as when He said to Nicodemus, "The Spirit breatheth where He will, and thou hearest His voice, but thou knowest not whence He cometh, or whither He goeth, so is every one who is born of the Spirit."¹ He did not mean that every one born of the Spirit had these qualities, but that this was what took place whenever any one was born of the Spirit. And, in the next parable, when He says "the Kingdom of God is like to a net cast into the sea," He means, in like manner, that there shall be in the Kingdom something which is faithfully represented by the incidents which follow when the net is drawn to shore. If this is so, it is not so much here that the Kingdom is the treasure or the pearl,

¹ St. John iii. 8.

or the finder or the merchant, but that it is a Kingdom in which the greatest and most absolute sacrifices are joyfully made for the sake of that good which is found without being sought, or found after being sought. This is the chief new point, then, in the instruction, that the Kingdom of Heaven is a Kingdom of immense sacrifices for the acquisition of immense treasures. There is that in this Kingdom which answers to the treasure and the pearl in value, but more than that, there is that in this Kingdom which is fitly represented by that appreciation of the treasure and of the pearl which leads to the parting with everything for the sake of their possession.

If this be taken as the principal point of these two parables, it is easy to see that a very wide range of application is laid open to us. In many respects the principal agent in the earlier parables is God Himself, or our Lord, and it seems natural, in the first instance, to carry on the same line of interpretation, and to consider that here also there is conveyed to us a representation of that infinite and ineffable love of God for the human soul, which brought about the whole condescension of the Incarnation, and all its consequences, in time and in eternity. For God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son for it, as we are told in the discourse of our Lord with Nicodemus. And our Lord so loved the human soul as to give for its purchase the whole that He had, for He sacrificed His own most beautiful life, His Sacred Humanity, which was destroyed on the Cross, for the purchase of that which He so highly appreciated. It is not difficult to carry out this interpretation into detail. The treasure hid in the field may be considered as

the soul of man encased in the corruptible body, or as the Church of the elect hidden in the mass of the human race, and the like. This treasure is hidden by Him Who finds it, for God leaves things as they are to outward appearance. His Kingdom, in many respects, is an internal Kingdom, and the whole action of His mercy, by which the redemption of the world was brought about, was quiet and unostentatious, such as to escape the eyes of the world itself, and to deceive, by its humility and lowliness and weakness, the inveterate and most watchful malice of the enemies of God and man. And again, our Lord hid the Church in the world of human society, He left it as a very small germ indeed, which the powerful and learned of the world could hardly think worthy of notice, and yet He made Himself, notwithstanding, master of all by means of it.

These are some of the applications of this line of interpretation, which are common to both of these parables, and we need not strain ourselves to find in them something answering to the distinction between the two images. In the first it is represented to us as if the finder of the treasure came on it unawares, without being on the search for it, while in the second parable he is represented as seeking for pearls and at last finding one of conspicuous value. In the first parable the merchant buys not only the treasure, but the whole field containing the treasure, in the second he buys only the pearl which he desires to become possessed of. Are there any truths in the purchase of our poor race by God and our Lord, which correspond to these details in the images which He uses? We may

suppose that, in the first place, the treasure is not desired so much for itself, for gold and silver are not in themselves capable of giving us half the satisfaction and enjoyment which they are capable in other ways of purchasing for us. Their great value lies in this, that they are the commodities by means of which we are put in possession of anything, whatever it may be that we desire. We cannot clothe ourselves with them, or feed upon them, nor will they heal our diseases, or alleviate pain, or be to us luxuries and comforts or enjoyments in themselves. They do all these things for us, on account of their value as the current medium of society, and if that were not so, they would be utterly useless to us, at least far less useful to us than iron or stone or wood. Now there is something answering to this in the value of human nature, in the eyes of God. It was not in itself anything very great and supremely valuable in His creation, certainly it was not so noble in itself as the angelic nature. But it was, in the first place, the one creature which He had made that belonged to both the two different kingdoms into which creation had been divided by Him, the visible and the invisible, the spiritual and the material. Thus, if He conceived the design of infinite condescension, of taking to Himself the creation which He had made by means of His own union with it, the human nature alone of all presented itself to Him as the central point, so to say, in which both creations met, and which therefore might enable Him to unite Himself to the whole, by uniting Himself to it.

Again, this may be said to be something like a discovery or finding on the part of God. For the

act and decree of Creation is distinct from the further decree and act of the union of Himself with Creation; which latter contains something not involved in the former act, something which arose out of the contemplation of the capacities of human nature, in the way of which we have been speaking. Thus, in the Scriptural account of the Creation, as we have it in the opening chapters of Genesis, it is represented to us as if the formation of Eve out of the side of Adam was a second thought, as if it had been occasioned by the fact that Adam had no companion, and that it was not well for him to be alone. In this way the act of God in choosing human nature for the point at which He would ally Himself with the whole of His Creation, may be represented to us in the parable of which we are speaking by the detail of the man finding a treasure in a field, and then for the sake of the treasure purchasing the whole field in which it was contained. And if we go on further in the history of this immense condescension of God, we find other details which answer to something in the parable. For our Lord has purchased to Himself again the whole creation, by virtue of His Incarnation. For even the material universe is to share in the regeneration, which is to be the fruit of the manifestation of the sons of God. Again, He has purchased to Himself the whole human race, although the Church of His elect will not comprise the whole race of Adam. All things that He does are for the sake of the elect, but these are the few, rather than the many among the children of men. Thus, in the first parable He is not represented as seeking all that He buys, as is the case in the second. For He seeks primarily,

and in the first instance, only those who are to be His throughout eternity, although in another sense it is most true that He seeks all. For He has paid the price for all, He has opened the blessings of salvation to all, and He most sincerely desires that all should be partakers of those blessings.

But, in the second of these parables, the details are varied, and yet it is as easy to see great truths concerning our Lord's love for the human soul in this, as in the former parable. In the first place, here it is a merchant seeking precious pearls, and not one who comes, as it were, unexpectedly, on a treasure of which he at once appreciates the value, and sacrifices everything to become its owner. That indeed is done, in this image also, but here our Lord seeks in the first instance what He finds. That which He seeks, then, is that which He purchases, neither more nor less, and what is it that He becomes the possessor of, except the soul of man, cleansed from all imperfection, and made glorious and radiant by His grace, in His eternal Kingdom? What is it but that Church, of which St. Paul speaks when he says that "Christ loved it, and delivered Himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water, in the word of life, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish?"² For, as the Apostle says, the Lord knoweth those who are His, and in the contemplations of the Sacred Heart, as well as in the Divine foreknowledge, these are the jewels which give to Him perfect delight, as far as He can receive such from anything outside

² Ephes. v. 25—27.

Himself. And our Lord had all the souls of His elect, as well as each single soul, most clearly in His mind and Heart in the moment of His great Sacrifice, when He gave all that He had to purchase each, not all in a mass, but one by one. And if He delighted to sacrifice Himself for all the race, even for the souls of those who He foreknew would not correspond to His grace, it was a special joy to Him to think of the souls that were to be His treasures throughout all eternity, by means of their own cooperation in the work which He was doing for them. And the soul of one single saint is a far more precious possession to Him, than many souls of others who do not love Him so much.

The most usual interpretation of these parables, however, is certainly that in which the treasure or the pearl that is found, represents something spiritual which men like ourselves find or seek, and then acquire at the price of all that they have. The spiritual good may be variously considered, whether as the faith, or the grace of God, or the knowledge of our Lord, or the salvation of the soul, or the religious vocation, or the practice of prayer and familiarity with God, or perfection, or any other great treasure of the same kind. In truth, it is not so much one particular spiritual blessing which our Lord seems to wish to set before us, as the object of the utmost desire, and so of the greatest sacrifice. It is rather that He seems to tell us that, for whatever it may be that is the one thing necessary for us, whether in the way of salvation or in the way of perfection, we must be ready to give all we have, and make whatever sacrifice may be required, if we are to be fit for the Kingdom of Heaven. But He

represents it as found by some without seeking, and as sought by others before it is found. For there is, in the Providence of God, each of these ways by which spiritual goods are to be acquired. To some they are not present as objects of desire before they are found, and yet they are at once secured by some great sacrifice. And, on the other hand, there are many who have to seek long, and with great perseverance, before they have the blessing of finding them.

Thus the faith of Christ was, as it were, suddenly found by St. Paul, and by others, such as the blessed martyr, St. Justin, it was sought for before it was found. In the history of conversions to the faith, and in that of vocations to religious life, or to the practices of perfection, there is constantly this variety in the dealings of God with the souls whom He wishes to make His own. Some find the truth like a treasure that suddenly appears before their feet, while they are thinking of something else, and others have to spend long laborious years in trying, first this and then that, and finding no satisfaction, until at last they come on that which is meant for them in the counsels of God. There are all these differences in the manner in which different souls come to the knowledge of that which it is the will of God for them to do, whether, for example, in embracing the faith, which they had not before, or in serving Him in the religious vocation, instead of in the world, or in the single state rather than in married life, or in the dedication of themselves entirely to the practice of prayer or of some particular kind of good work, as missionary labour, or labour in the instruction of the young or the ignorant, or such a calling as that of St. Benedict Joseph

Labre, or any other. These differences are represented in the parables by the different antecedents, of the finder of the treasure, and of the finder of the pearl.

But again, on the other hand, there is no difference at all in the condition which is set forth in the parable before us, namely, that the good, when found, must be purchased at the cost of all. To some this law involves the acquirement of something more than the thing itself, which is contained in it, as when a man has to join the visible body of the Catholic Church as the means of gaining the faith and the grace of God, or to enter religion for the sake of living in continence, or to acquire a great amount of human learning, in order to teach the ignorant, or to guide souls to perfection. In such cases the Parable of the Treasure hidden in the field has its application, while in others it is the precious pearl alone which has to be acquired at the cost of all, as when men already in the true fold are called to perfection, or souls already pledged to our Lord in religious life are called to the life of prayer. In these cases, and in others like them, the price must be paid. And surely we may understand our Lord here also as prophesying what shall be in the Church. We may suppose Him to mean that His Kingdom is to be one in which these great sacrifices are to be common and continual. And thus, putting together these two lines of interpretation, that which refers the search and the sacrifice to God, and that which refers them to men, we have a complete picture of one great characteristic of the Kingdom. It is one in which God gives immensely, and, to speak in human language, makes great sacri-

fices, for the sake of gaining the human soul, or the Catholic Church, or the race of man, one in which, on the other hand, the blessed infection of sacrifice spreads, far and wide, among those who are the objects of this love of God. They too are able by His grace to give their all willingly and heroically for the sake of His boons, or promise to accomplish His will in themselves, to gain some great spiritual good. Thus the Apostles, when our Lord asked whether they could drink His chalice, said boldly, We can. And there is no hint in either of these parables that the sacrifices thus made are ever repented of, or that perseverance and constancy are ever lacking in those who have once begun the life of entire service to God which has been shown to be so precious.

Indeed, the parables themselves help us, in some measure, even here. For if we ask ourselves, in conclusion, how we are to secure this blessed gift of perseverance, how to prevent ourselves from ever retracting our sacrifices, and thus casting away our pearl or losing our treasure, the answer seems to be conveyed in a consideration arising from the parables themselves. The man who finds the treasure, and the merchant who seeks the pearl, begin by having a right estimate of the value of that for which they give so much. It is the appreciation of the value of their purchase that makes their conduct reasonable, and the same appreciation which prevents them from ever regretting what they have done in making the purchase. In the case of any of the spiritual treasures which have been purchased by the sacrifices which we have to make, it can only be by the dying out in our minds of the

sense of the value of these blessings, of the value of salvation, or of perfection, or of the life of prayer, and so of other things, that we can lose our fervour and become so unreasonable as to cast our purchase away. It is a well-known characteristic of spiritual goods, that they do not pall on the appetite of those who have them. That is what always happens in the good things of this world. They are objects of great desire while they are not yet attained, but when they have been attained they are found to weary the heart instead of satisfying it. They are not the goods for which we are made, nor are they made to give satisfaction to the needs and desires of our nature. But spiritual goods are so made, and we are made for them, and so it is that the more they are known, the more they are desired, and the more they are possessed, the more hungry we become after them. And thus, even the silence of these parables as to any wearying of the purchaser of the treasure or the pearl, may not be without a Divine meaning. For it may be intended to show us that, fickle and inconstant as we are, and surrounded by temptations, we shall still never regret the ventures we have had to make in giving ourselves most entirely to God. For the goods which are won by those ventures will be in themselves the constant cause of ever greater delight and satisfaction to those who have so purchased them. And, finally, the simple consideration of this truth suggests to us the means which we are to use to keep alive in ourselves the fervour which first led us to any sacrifices we have made. The continual contemplation and recollection of the preciousness of our treasure or our pearl should be enough for this purpose.

magnificent outward development of the seed, whether in the individual soul, or in the world at large, in the growth of virtues and good works which present a great show, even to the outward eye, and in the formation of a mighty and conspicuous power, which serves even as a refuge and protection for the rulers of the world and of society, which also is the work of God. In the Parable of the Leaven, our Lord describes the interior working of the seed, or of the Christian element, in the world or in the soul, its process of assimilation, the manner in which it does not set up, as it were, a new kingdom for itself altogether, without relations with and influences on what already exists, but rather contents itself with affecting by its own influences the mass into which it is put by the wisdom of God.

The Parables of the Treasure and of the Pearl, as has been said, carry on the description of the kingdom a step further, for they set before us the truth of the immense goods, and the immense sacrifice made for the sake of those goods, which are to be found in the Kingdom of Heaven. The whole story of Christian heroism is contained in these parables, and it might seem that, having taken us thus far, our Lord might hold His hand, and leave us in the contemplation of the lofty vocations of which the Kingdom of which He speaks furnishes so many examples, and the great prices at which those vocations have been bought. And we closed the last chapter by the remark, that our Lord has not added anything to hint that it might be possible for men to weary of the prizes which they may have once acquired, by means of faithfulness to the

guidance of God in the following of some high vocation, because, as it appeared, the spiritual treasures of the Kingdom are too precious, and too continually growing upon the taste of those who possess them, for there to be any danger of failing courage, and of generous perseverance in their pursuit.

But, if this were the doctrine of these two last parables, it might be one which is contradicted by the experience of the Christian centuries. It would come to this, that a sacrifice once made might be enough for a life, and that human frailty was not frail enough to cause ruin in many souls which have once taken up the best part. Our Lord is always warning us that it is not so. He said more than once, when He had been speaking of the highest vocations in His Church, that many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first. It seems as if this was in His mind in the last of this series of parables, which now remains to be explained. That is, it seems as if He had intended to end the series by setting forth this truth, that among all orders of men in the Church, and therefore, even among those who have outwardly been the most heroic in their sacrifices for Him, there would be found some who would not in the end be worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the burthen of the Parable of the Seine cast into the sea, of which we have now to speak.

“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a net cast into the sea, and gathering together of all kind of fishes. Which, when it was filled, they drew out, and sitting by the shore, they chose out the good into vessels, but the bad they cast forth. So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked

magnificent outward development of the seed, whether in the individual soul, or in the world at large, in the growth of virtues and good works which present a great show, even to the outward eye, and in the formation of a mighty and conspicuous power, which serves even as a refuge and protection for the rulers of the world and of society, which also is the work of God. In the Parable of the Leaven, our Lord describes the interior working of the seed, or of the Christian element, in the world or in the soul, its process of assimilation, the manner in which it does not set up, as it were, a new kingdom for itself altogether, without relations with and influences on what already exists, but rather contents itself with affecting by its own influences the mass into which it is put by the wisdom of God.

The Parables of the Treasure and of the Pearl, as has been said, carry on the description of the kingdom a step further, for they set before us the truth of the immense goods, and the immense sacrifice made for the sake of those goods, which are to be found in the Kingdom of Heaven. The whole story of Christian heroism is contained in these parables, and it might seem that, having taken us thus far, our Lord might hold His hand, and leave us in the contemplation of the lofty vocations of which the Kingdom of which He speaks furnishes so many examples, and the great prices at which those vocations have been bought. And we closed the last chapter by the remark, that our Lord has not added anything to hint that it might be possible for men to weary of the prizes which they may have once acquired, by means of faithfulness to the

guidance of God in the following of some high vocation, because, as it appeared, the spiritual treasures of the Kingdom are too precious, and too continually growing upon the taste of those who possess them, for there to be any danger of failing courage, and of generous perseverance in their pursuit.

But, if this were the doctrine of these two last parables, it might be one which is contradicted by the experience of the Christian centuries. It would come to this, that a sacrifice once made might be enough for a life, and that human frailty was not frail enough to cause ruin in many souls which have once taken up the best part. Our Lord is always warning us that it is not so. He said more than once, when He had been speaking of the highest vocations in His Church, that many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first. It seems as if this was in His mind in the last of this series of parables, which now remains to be explained. That is, it seems as if He had intended to end the series by setting forth this truth, that among all orders of men in the Church, and therefore, even among those who have outwardly been the most heroic in their sacrifices for Him, there would be found some who would not in the end be worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the burthen of the Parable of the Seine cast into the sea, of which we have now to speak.

“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a net cast into the sea, and gathering together of all kind of fishes. Which, when it was filled, they drew out, and sitting by the shore, they chose out the good into vessels, but the bad they cast forth. So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked

from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

At first sight, this parable seems almost a repetition of that of the cockle sown in the midst of the wheat, and it requires some explanation to distinguish the peculiar point of each from that of the other. It is obvious, however, that in the former parable one great point, at least, is the principle of toleration, so to call it, on which the master of the field acts, in permitting the cockle to grow in the midst of the wheat. This is done deliberately, it is perhaps a departure from the natural line of action, and is the more noticeable on that account. For it is very conceivable that a good husbandman might weed his field of useless plants even before the harvest. But in the case of the net or seine let down into the sea, which is then dragged along the bottom, so as to enclose all the fish that are in that part of the waters, the presence of bad fishes is what is to be expected, as well as that of good fishes. Again, in the Parable of the Cockle, the evil seed is deliberately introduced into the field by the action of an enemy, whereas there is nothing of this kind in the facts of the parable before us. The separation made by the reapers, that is, by the angels, in the former parable, is a measure taken to repair, in a certain sense, the toleration before extended to the evil seed. The object is to set right the mischief which may have been done by that toleration. In the case of the net, the division is rendered necessary by the conditions under which the original process of fishing is carried on, which fills the net with fishes both bad and good. The division is the principal feature in the second

parable; it is the necessary complement of the principal feature in the first.

In the Parable of the Cockle there are but two kinds of grain gathered in at the harvest. The good grain is that which is left after the cockle has been removed. But in this Parable of the Seine we have the net collecting, as it is drawn on towards the shore, fishes of every kind. It is no longer one kind that is good and another kind that is bad. All are equally within the compass of the net, all are drawn together to the shore. We have thus a different picture from the former in this parable. We have the picture of a great variety of kinds of fishes, and there are presumably good and bad of every kind. Some kinds are better than others, but even of the best kind there will be worthless fishes. The ultimate division is not made by any external mark of difference, as that between the cockle and the wheat, but by the qualities of each individual fish of whatever kind it may be. It is an important doctrine, as has been remarked by some of the Catholic commentators on the passage, that there is no nature bad in itself, no class, no vocation, no race, no lineage, no blood, no condition of life and work, which is either a passport to salvation or an exclusion from the pale of salvation. The Church includes all kinds, all races, all conditions of men, and the final division is to be ruled by the goodness or badness of the individual, and not of the race, or the nation, or the vocation, or the position in the Church itself, which may belong to this or that person. Here then is a principle which adds a new truth to those which have been already set forth in the parables, and which comes, moreover, most opportunely after

the teaching of the last pair of parables, those of the Treasure and of the Pearl.

These two last parables, as has been said, have carried us on to the doctrine of the great sacrifices and high vocations which are characteristic of the Kingdom of Heaven. And as was also said, they leave out of sight the possibility of the purchasers of the treasure or the pearl failing in perseverance and becoming wearied of the blessings which have been purchased by them. At a later period of His teaching we shall find our Lord delivering the great Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, immediately after He had assured the Apostles of the very great reward which they are to have, who have left all things and followed Him. After making them the magnificent promise which He then made, and extending it to all who should leave the things most dear to them for His sake, He added that there were to be first who should be last, and last who should be first. And then He delivered that famous parable, as if for the especial purpose of warning them, that even the highest vocations might be forfeited, and that the gifts of grace were not always to correspond, in their distribution, to the order or comparative excellence of the vocations in the Church.

In the parable before us this doctrine, which is also the doctrine of the Parable of the Virgins, delivered still later on, is conveyed in the image of the fishes drawn to the shore by the net. There are to be in the Church people of every kind. There are to be ecclesiastics and religious, there are to be hermits and holy virgins, there are to be those vowed to the life of contemplation, or the life of active charity, those who have the awful powers of conse-

cration of the Blessed Sacrament, and of applying the merits of the Precious Blood for the cleansing of souls from sin. Some are to preach the Divine Word, some are to be the pastors of souls, some are to be the rulers of the Christian people. And by their side in the great net there are to be those who have been ruled and guided by them, the married and the dwellers in the world, the soldiers and the statesmen and the artisans and the poor labourers, those whom the proud Pharisees of our Lord's own day would have looked down on as the publicans and sinners. But the selection and division to be made at the end of all things, will be governed by no other principle than that of the goodness or the badness of the individual soul, whatever may have been its position in the external Kingdom of God on earth. Neither religion, nor the ecclesiastical calling, nor the glory of the pastoral office, nor the honourable state of continence, nor the priesthood, nor learning employed in the service of the Church, nor zeal in works of charity, nor the labours of the missionary, nor anything else of that order, is of itself sufficient to ensure the salvation of the soul. All these things are not incompatible with great unfaithfulness, and in all these positions death may find the soul unprepared, and with the stain on it of secret and unrepented sin. This is one side of the peculiar lesson of this parable.

We learn also, on the other hand, that when death strikes men down in the pursuit of some earthly and worldly calling, on the battlefield, or on the sea, or in the mart, or in the law-courts, when it gleans its victims from cottages or palaces,

or falls on them suddenly in the street, in the midst of the strain of political conflicts, or far away from the means of grace and the ordinary consolations of the dying soul, it does not follow that those thus called to their account are among those who are to be rejected from the treasures of God. He alone knows the heart of man and the state of the soul, and it will be by that knowledge that the judgment will be administered and the lot of each child of Adam decided for all eternity. This then seems to be the special meaning of this parable, with which the series is closed, to signify that although in the Church there are so many various vocations and conditions of life, so many differences between the outward circumstances and opportunities of men with regard to the means of grace themselves, yet still the selection of souls for the Heavenly Kingdom will not be made according to these, but that the only certain passport to these eternal joys will be faithfulness and purity of conscience, and that by the application of this rule it will be possible for the lowest to be raised on high, and for the highest to be rejected altogether.

One other feature of the parable has been fastened on by the Catholic commentators, of which it may be well to say a word. In this parable it is said that the good fishes are gathered into vessels, while the evil are thrown promiscuously away. In the Parable of the Cockle, on the other hand, it is said that the cockle is gathered into bundles to be burnt, and the wheat is gathered into the barns of the great Householder. In the case of the cockle it has been thought that the gathering into bundles signified the truth that the sinners of each particular kind of sin would

be punished hereafter together, the avaricious with those like them, the proud with the proud, the lascivious with the lascivious, and the rest. So, in the present parable, it is thought that the gathering of the good fishes into vessels may signify the special character of the rewards of Heaven, which are to be apportioned, like the chastisements of the place of torture, in strict correspondence to the deserts in each case. The circumstance in question in each of these parables is perfectly natural, as a line in the general picture, and thus it might have been added by a human author merely for the purpose of embellishment, for it is as natural to bind the cockle in bundles as it is to gather the good fishes into baskets or other vessels. But we have good reason for thinking, from the manner in which our Lord has explained those parables of which we have direct and detailed explanations from Him, that no circumstance is added in these Divine pictures, without some specially intended meaning, and on this account it is safer to think that in the cases before us the explanation of the details in question may not be too far-fetched.

BOOK II.

- CHAP. I.—The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.**
- “ **II.—The Parable of the Good Shepherd.**
- “ **III.—The Parable of the Good Samaritan.**
- “ **IV.—The Parable of the Watchful Servants.**
- “ **V.—The Parable of the Fig-tree.**
- “ **VI.—The Parable of the Guests and the Supper.**
- “ **VII.—§ 1. The Parable of the Lost Sheep.**
 - § 2. The Parable of the Lost Groat.
 - § 3. The Parable of the Prodigal Son.
- “ **VIII.—The Parable of the Unjust Steward.**
- “ **IX.—The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.**
- “ **X.—The Parable of the Importunate Widow.**
- “ **XI.—The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.**

CHAPTER I.

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT.

St. Matt. xviii. 21—35; *Story of the Gospels*, § 88.

[AFTER the delivery of the first great series of parables in the second year of our Lord's Public Teaching, we find a great absence of any further use of the same method of teaching on the part of our Lord. The reason why we have so few parables in the next months of His Life seems to be that we have, during that time, comparatively few records at all of His teaching as addressed mainly to the people. About a year after the delivery of the Parable of the Sower, He went up to Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles, and in the interval between the two points of time He was frequently passing from place to place to avoid danger from His enemies, and was much less generally in contact with the multitudes than before. It is also very likely that the series of parables of which we have already spoken have been collected together by St. Matthew, as he has before collected together a chain of miracles which certainly were separated one from the other by considerable intervals of time, and which did not even occur exactly in the order in which the Evangelist has placed them. The parables may have been collected by him in the same way as the miracles. However, this is uncertain. But we may consider it likely

that when our Lord was speaking to the multitudes in Galilee during the period of which we speak, He may, as St. Mark expressly says, have done so usually in the form of parables, although these teachings of His are not recorded.

It is at a point of time when He was about to leave Galilee permanently, at least as the chief seat of His Ministry, that the next parable occurs, that of the Unmerciful Servant. It belongs to a class of teaching very different from the former parables, and seems to have been addressed to the Apostles or disciples alone, like the warnings against scandal, and the doctrines about fraternal correction and the necessity of the childlike temper, which occur at the same time. It is clear that the idea of the Christian community as a Body, more or less highly organized, a Church, with its discipline and its spiritual powers, which was now gradually set forth by our Lord, takes us into a different sphere of teaching from that which is set forth in the first parables, about the sower and the seed, the cockle amid the wheat, and even the seine which contains various kinds of fishes. The parables which are scattered over the narrative as we proceed towards the great catastrophe of the Passion, all belong to a more advanced stage in Christian progress, or delineate features in our Lord's character and the dealings of God with men, which are not manifest at first sight. Such is the Parable—though it is not put in the parabolic form—of the Good Shepherd, and those of the Good Samaritan, the Fig-tree, the Lost Sheep, the Groat, the Prodigal Son. Such in a different way are those of the Unjust Steward, and of the Rich Man and Lazarus, although in some of these last, which were

delivered in a part of the country in which our Lord had before preached, we see a good deal of the more elementary character of the earlier series. Towards the end of our Lord's preaching the parables become more and more prophetic, and we may have, in consequence, to place them under a separate head.

It is enough for the present to remember that the parables which are now to be explained belong to the later period of our Lord's preaching, after St. Peter had made his great confession of faith, and received the promise of the foundation of the Church upon him, and of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. It was only after this that our Lord felt free to speak of His coming Passion, to teach the doctrine of the Cross, and to lay down gradually what may be called the special laws of the new Kingdom. Though not exclusively, the next set of parables, or rather, the parables scattered over the next months of His teaching, were in great measure addressed to the Apostles principally, and they were besides delivered mostly in Judæa or Peræa, instead of in Galilee. Other special characteristics of these parables must be left to be drawn out by the reader himself.]

Although nothing had been said concerning the forgiveness of injuries in the discourses of our Lord which appear to have immediately preceded the parable which we are now to consider; still the subject of such forgiveness is closely connected with the instruction—addressed especially to St. Peter—as to the method of dealing with one who has offended against him. It is at least highly probable that it was this instruction which suggested St. Peter's

question about the duty of forgiveness; and even if the question itself was not put by the Apostle to our Lord at the very same time with the former discussions, it may certainly be assumed that the interval of time was not long between the discourse of which we have been speaking, and the question as to forgiveness and the beautiful parable with which our Lord answered it.

"Then came Peter unto Him, and said, Lord, how often shall my brother offend against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith to him, I say not unto thee till seven times, but till seventy times seven times. Therefore is the Kingdom of Heaven likened unto a king, who would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to take the account, one was brought to him that owed him ten thousand talents. And as he had not wherewith to pay it, his lord commanded that he should be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. But that servant falling down, besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And the lord of that servant being moved with pity, let him go and forgave him the debt. But when that servant was gone out, he found one of his fellow-servants that owed him a hundred pence, and laying hold of him, he throttled him, saying, Pay what thou owest! And his fellow-servant, falling down, besought him, saying, Have patience with me and I will pay thee all. And he would not, but went and cast him into prison till he paid the debt. Now, his fellow-servants seeing what was done, were very much grieved, and they came and told their lord all that was done. Then his lord called him, and said to him, Thou wicked servant! I forgave thee all the debt because thou besoughtest me. Shouldst not thou then have had com-

passion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had compassion on thee? And his lord being angry delivered him to the torturers until he paid all the debt. So also shall My Heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."

This beautiful parable sets before us one side of the mercifulness which is characteristic of God, and the imitation of which He insists on almost more urgently than anything else in those whom He makes His children in this world. The side of this gracious attribute which is here exhibited is chosen by our Lord on account of the question asked him by St. Peter, which referred to the forgiveness of injuries to a brother. For forgiveness of debts and injuries is mercy exercised in one particular way. We see the other side of the same attribute in such parables as those of the Good Samaritan or the Ten Virgins. In those others the part of God's mercifulness which is selected for display is the compassion on afflictions of every kind, whereas here, as has been said, it is the peculiar act of mercy which consists in the forgiveness of offences. For the mercifulness of God, even as far as it can be imitated by us, exercises itself in a great many various ways. But, again, our Lord is led by the form of the question put to Him, to speak directly rather of the obligation of the practice of perfect forgiveness than of the enormous blessings which are involved in that virtue, and which ought to make us welcome every occasion of its practice as the finding of a great treasure, rather than submit to the use of such occasions as a duty. Our Lord bids us pray daily, "Forgive us our trespass as we forgive those who trespass against us." Thus He

bids us take into our mind and heart, whenever we repeat His Prayer, all the offences which we may have received, of every kind, as well as all those that we may have committed, and by the perfect forgiveness of the first fit ourselves to gain the perfect obliteration of the obligations we have incurred by the second. Thus we are continually to practise our souls in this Divine virtue, especially in order that we may continually receive the pardon which God bestows on us for its exercise. This is what He means when He says, "When you shall stand to pray, forgive if you have ought against any man, that your Father also Who is in Heaven may forgive you your sins."¹ The teaching of this parable is precisely the same, but it is put in a different way. Instead of teaching us that if we want to be forgiven we must make an act of universal forgiveness before we ask for our own pardon, our Lord here tells us that our own pardon will be cancelled and reversed if we do not from our hearts forgive whatever we may have to forgive.

The parable is so simple in its obvious meaning that it hardly requires much explanation. But there is always in these parables of our Lord a question as to the signification of the particular details, apart from the general scope of the parable, which is plain to all. And in this case there are some few points on which it may be worth our while to inquire how far they may have a special meaning of their own. The question of St. Peter, as has been said, was probably suggested by the general tenour of the doctrine which our Lord had been laying down. The Apostle thought it a very great thing indeed to

¹ St. Mark xi. 25.

propose that he should forgive his brother seven times over. Indeed there are very few men who would ordinarily go so far in the way of condonation of the same offence, and the mass of mankind would probably find something to blame, at least in a parent or a superior of any degree, who passed over the repetition of the same offence so many times as seven. But it is not necessary to suppose that there is question here only of the repeated forgiveness of the same repeated offence. Our Lord does not teach that superiors or parents are to forgive offences which are not repented of, or to forbear even from wholesome punishment in cases where that may seem to be needed for the emendation of the offender, or as an example to others for the due maintenance of discipline and virtue. There are in such cases principles involved peculiar to themselves. An offence may be forgiven from the heart which yet it may be a duty to punish externally, as the sin of David in the matter of Uriah was visited on him by God, first by the death of the child born to him, and afterwards by the chastisement which he underwent in the rebellion of Absalom, and in other ways. But the majority of men would think that with whatever amount of sincerity the pardon of the same offence was sought at their hands over and over again, there must be some limit to their forgiveness, and few would go beyond St. Peter with his seven times, even if they went so far. It is, of course, not so difficult to have a habit of perpetually forgiving, when there is not the additional circumstances of the repetition of faults several times forgiven, and it seems to be this habit of which our Lord is here speaking, the habit of most gladly and

heartily welcoming as a great blessing every occasion of forgiveness which presents itself to us, as men bent on the acquirement of wealth hail with the greatest eagerness every occasion of enriching themselves more and more.

Our Lord's answer of "seventy times seven" must be understood as simply indicating that there is to be no limit whatever, that the number of times of the occurrence of the offence must have nothing to do with the question of its condonation. The Divine reason for this is contained in the truth which is represented in the parable by the forgiving of the debt of ten thousand talents by the king. This truth is that we are debtors to God for the pardon of innumerable sins, and that, in consequence, if we are to be His children, and to earn our forgiveness, we must set no limit to our repeated forgiveness of others, who may offend against ourselves. The proportion, or rather the impossibility of there being any proportion, between the offences in which we are debtors to God, and the cases in which men are, as it were, debtors to us, is represented in the parable by the proportion between the ten thousand talents on the one hand and the hundred pence on the other. It is easy to see that the image used in the parable is utterly inadequate to sustain the comparison. For there can be no offence against man which can be compared in gravity with any offences which we commit against God. The truth that God makes our forgiveness of others the condition and the measure of our pardon by Him, as we are taught by the very wording of our Lord's Prayer, is touched in the parable by the significant feature, that the words in which the fellow-servant

of the man who has been forgiven by his lord pleads for patience, are identical with those used by that man to his lord in the first instance. The enforcement on the part of God of the condition of forgiveness of others, if we are to hope for forgiveness from Him, is the main point of the parable, just as in the description of the separation of men at the Judgment day as the sheep are separated from the goats, in the last of our Lord's parables, the connection between the practice of the works of mercy here and the eternal rewards which are to be allotted at that last day, is the main point of that teaching. The points as to which there may be some doubt or difficulty in the details of this parable are easily seen, and we may pause a moment to say a few words with regard to each of these.

In the first place, then, it may create some difficulty that it is said in the parable that, when the unmerciful servant had treated his debtor so cruelly and in a manner which displayed so much ingratitude to his own lord, "his fellow-servants seeing what was done, were very much grieved, and they came and told their lord what had been done." It is not probable that our Lord could mean here that the fellow-servants of Christians will make complaints against them to God, at least in the way of demanding vengeance and bringing an accusation against the offender. Thus this circumstance seems at first sight merely an ornament and embellishment in the parable, without anything in truth corresponding to it. But it may be meant that any want of perfect charity between man and man, especially between servants of the same lord, as is the case with Christians, or between persons belonging to

different classes of society in mutual relation one with the other, is an injury to society and to the Church as such, and therefore a cause of pain and scandal to all good and loving members of the same, who have the interests of the community at heart. An act like that of the unmerciful servant has a direct tendency to destroy the peace of the Church, to bring down chastisements upon society, to separate class from class, to cool mutual love and confidence, and to impede the force of Christian prayer. Let us dwell for a moment on the considerations thus suggested.

Every one is edified and every one is blessed when charitable and merciful practices prevail. But although the saints of God and the holy angels would not complain to Him in any angry spirit against offenders against charity, they might well be moved to pray very earnestly for the conversion of such offenders and the redress of the hardship. Their prayers might have the effect of bringing about, in the Providential order of things, some visitation on the sinner, which might issue in his conversion and in the relief of the poor sufferer from his severity. And if God sent some chastisement, in the course of His Providence, on the home or the family of the ungrateful man, that would not be simply as a measure of vengeance and of anger. It would be rather, as all chastisements inflicted in this world are, ordained by and tempered with mercy, and a direct appeal to him to enter into himself, and so obtain the pardon once more of his fault. For it is constantly the way of God to plague those who have offended Him, especially in any scandalous way, by affliction which visits their homes and

families, as if to make them consider what it is that they have done to bring down on them the anger of God. In this sense we may understand the complaint of the fellow-servants, as well as the chastisement which is spoken of in the parable as inflicted on the unmerciful servant, as when it is said, that the lord being angry delivered him to the torturers until he paid all the debt.

Another point as to which question may be raised with regard to the details of the parable is contained in the passage in which it is said that the unmerciful servant is handed over by his lord to the punishment, or rather, the torture which he might have undergone, if his own lord had been equally unmerciful to him in the first instance. He is treated, according to the story, as if he had never been forgiven. It has been thought by some that this implies that when we fall into sin afresh, the pardon already accorded to us for past sins which have been confessed is altogether cancelled, and we become once again victims of the wrath of God, not only for the sin which has brought on us this renewed anger of God, but also for all others that we have ever committed, even though they may have been cancelled by penance and absolution. It is true that the lord in the parable treats the unmerciful servant in that manner. But even if the doctrine which is meant to be drawn from this parable were to be understood in the strictest sense, in harmony with this detail, it would not follow that the punishment was now inflicted for the former sins. It would only follow that the guilt of the new sin of unmercifulness and ingratitude was heinous enough to deserve and receive punishment equal to

the full exaction of the debt. It may have been, not that the old guilt revived, but that the circumstance of ingratitude and hardness added so much new guilt to the soul, as to make it liable to the punishment which it might have received if the guilt had not been forgiven. Thus any sin, once pardoned, is not revived by the ingratitude of the sinner who refuses to forgive in return the small offences that he may have to forgive. But this is in itself a great sin, and one which places the soul in a state of damnation, and more, in a state in which it is most difficult for it to obtain fresh forgiveness. For such hardness stops up the very fountain of God's mercies, which are only promised to us on the condition of our pardoning the offences of others against us.

A sinner reciting the Lord's Prayer in this state of heart is really imprecating on himself the merciless anger of God. For he asks to be forgiven as he forgives, and as he does not forgive, he asks not to be forgiven. It is not the ingratitude which is irremissible, but the unmercifulness. There is always in every sin a large element of ingratitude, and we are probably none of us aware of the immense debt which we owe to God's justice in this respect. To be fully grateful to God requires an enlightenment and a fervour which are found only in the saints. Unless we know all that we receive day after day, and hour after hour, from God, it is not possible for us to give Him the thanks which He deserves. Therefore the admixture of ingratitude in our service to Him is a fault which, in His infinite compassion, He may look on with greater mercy, though St. Paul tells us that one of the chief causes

of the miseries to which the heathen world was abandoned was their deep ingratitude to God, as far as they knew Him. But mercifulness requires the most exquisite enlightenment. It ought to be the very air which we breathe, for it is by the mercy of God alone that we are what we are, and have all that we have, and hope for all that we hope for. We can only be unmerciful by forgetting our own relations and position with regard to God, by having false ideas of our own rights and claims, and by utterly ignoring our own need of mercy. Thus unmercifulness is inconsistent with the love of God and the love of our neighbour, and is in itself an almost sufficient sign of reprobation. And when a man has just been imploring for himself the mercy of his offended and justly incensed Lord and Master, and has just received from Him the forgiveness of all his debt simply out of compassion, there must be in his heart a revolt and revival of malignity of the blackest kind, if he can turn at once on his brother and refuse him his pardon. All grace must be swept away from the soul in such cases, and therefore it is that there is no exaggeration in the figure used by our Lord in the parable where He describes the chastisement of this unmerciful servant, as being the exaction of all that he had himself been liable to before he was forgiven.

We have remarked that it has pleased our Lord in this passage to insist on the duty of forgiveness rather from the terrible motive of the punishments to which we may be exposed by the contrary fault, than by setting before us the innumerable blessings which are placed easily within the reach of those who are careful to practise the merciful and forgiving

temper. Just so He chose, in the passage of which this parable is the continuation, to dwell especially and more than once on the terrible punishment of the scandalous, although He did not altogether omit the immense blessings awaiting those who are careful of His little ones. The form of our Lord's teaching may be accounted for by the question of St. Peter. To ask how many times we are to forgive implies that there is to be a limit to our indulgence in this regard. It is not the language of one who looks on every possible occasion of forgiving any one anything as the most blessed of treasures. St. Peter seems to ask what was to be the precise limit put to his practice of a virtue which contained in itself so immense a treasure, as if perhaps it were possible for him to be too frequent in forgiving. Therefore the duty of forgiveness of his brother was put, by the terms of his question, as if it were more of a duty than a privilege, a thing the practice of which required urging on rather than checking. The true aspect of forgiveness is this which is placed second only in the question before us, and which is implied in the position which this virtue holds in the prayer of our Lord.

In very truth, every opportunity of forgiveness of another is a precious gift from the mercifulness of God, putting in our hands the power to bathe ourselves afresh in the life-giving streams of His grace and compassion. It is an occasion on which we are told to take the key of God's treasures and help ourselves to as much as we will. Most truly then is it said by the Fathers that our enemies and all who injure us are our best benefactors, opening to us opportunities which otherwise we should never

have. The teaching of our Lord, when taken into consideration together with the words of His Prayer, suggests to us the careful study of every kind of mercifulness, as a skilful householder considers in how many ways and how quickly and most often he may multiply in profitable investments the resources which he has to dispose of. The measure set before us in our practice of this virtue is simply the relation in which we wish ourselves to stand with God. We wish Him to think of us and deal with us and behave towards us, with the most unclouded confidence and the most perfect affection, without even the slightest remembrance that we have ever offended Him, as also with the most perfect substantial pardon for our offences, without reserve or mistrust, as if we had always been most innocent and most faithful, emptying upon us the choicest boons of His most magnificent beneficence. All this, and more than we can imagine, more than our most soaring wishes can rise to, it is within our own power to obtain, by the exercise of the privilege of forgiveness to others, in this sense the highest of all the boons which He has placed in our hands, because it is the coin which purchases all boons whatsoever. We have but to carry out into every thought and word and action and feeling towards our neighbour this most perfect charity, and then we may be certain that all which we seek from God will be ours.

CHAPTER II.

PARABLE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

St. John x. 1—21; *Story of the Gospels*, § 96.

[WHAT is called the Parable of the Good Shepherd may be better understood for a few words of introduction. It cannot be doubted that the thought of His own office as the Shepherd of souls, as He is called by St. Peter, and of the extent to which that office was to be communicated to others after Him in the Church, beginning with St. Peter himself, was a thought on which the Sacred Heart would constantly dwell with intense love and pleasure, mingled with anxious forebodings as to the manner in which those to whom this office was to be communicated would discharge the duties committed to them, in the many generations which were to succeed before the end of time. The whole execution of the gracious plan for the salvation of the human race, to which the fruits of the Precious Blood were to be entrusted, was wrapped up for success or failure in the Christian ministry. At the time when the words upon which we are now to comment were spoken, our Lord was about to open the last stage of His preaching, passing from Galilee into the other parts of the Holy Land, Judæa, and Peræa, beginning by a short stay at Jerusalem itself,

whither He went up unexpectedly and secretly for the great feast of Tabernacles in the autumn, which was to be the last of the great festivals at which He was to be present before His Passion. As He had not been present at the preceding Pasch, it was a matter of conjecture among the priests at Jerusalem whether He would come up now, and they were waiting with great anxiety for His appearance, and with an accumulation of hatred and hostility in their hearts, only less bitter and malicious than the opposition which was to meet Him at His final ascent to Jerusalem a few months later.

We must leave the details of their conduct at this feast of Tabernacles to the history of our Lord's Life. It is enough here to say that these men, who were in possession of the pastorate of souls in the holy nation, showed most sadly their utter want of the true spirit which is required for that great office, by thwarting and endeavouring to ensnare Him on every occasion which presented itself to them. The matter came to a climax, in consequence of the great miracle on the man born blind, to whom our Lord gave sight, and who—for no other reason than that he asserted that our Lord, Who had shown such marvellous powers in his favour, was a prophet—was excommunicated by them. Our Lord afterwards found him, and drew him on to the faith in Himself as the Son of God, thus consoling him, so to speak, for the loss of the privileges of the ancient people of God by an admission to those of the Gospel Kingdom.

It was after this that our Lord spoke some very solemn words of warning¹ to these His most

¹ St. John ix. 39.

perverse opponents, about their judicial blindness in not receiving Him, and then followed on with the Parable, as we call it—though it lacks the formal statement that it was such—of the Good Shepherd. It includes, as was natural, much about that other class of shepherds, not good, contrasting their ways and motives very sadly with His own. The evil which they were doing was incalculable, but in this discourse our Lord chooses to deal with them in a very tender though at the same time a very solemn manner. This must be kept in mind as the following paragraphs are read. He has before Him a class of the most unfaithful shepherds, the most unlike to the Good Shepherd that can be conceived. Yet He does not denounce them, or even speak in such a manner that might expose to the people their faults and shortcomings, and He adds, for the benefit of the hearers, and the Church afterwards, a great many beautiful sayings concerning Himself as the Good Shepherd, and the pattern of all who are to serve God faithfully in that ministry, so as to leave open the door for them to repent and become His faithful servants, and also to set forth a great amount of doctrinal teaching concerning Himself. Thus, on the one hand, this discourse is to be illustrated by other sayings of His on the same subject, especially in the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the other two which accompany it, and on the other hand, it is to be contrasted with the severe teaching of His last days in the Temple. In the great denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees which is contained in the twenty-third chapter of St. Matthew, we may see what our Lord is here keeping back, as to His thoughts and judgments concerning them,

and what an amount of Divine wrath and vengeance their obstinate perversity was heaping up against themselves.]

The sin of which these priests of Jerusalem had been guilty, and which they had renewed and intensified by their treatment of the man on whom this last miracle had been worked, was not simply a sin of obstinate incredulity, as it might have been in any of the common people who might have refused to accept the evidence of miracles in favour of our Lord. They were not of the common people. They were men in authority, which had been received from God, and they were responsible to Him, not only for their management of their own souls in matters of private conduct, but for their use of the power which He had connected with their office, a power which put them into relations with the people around them which may best be described by the word pastoral. They had now misused this power, put into their hands by God, in direct hostility to the work of God, and in this respect their sin had a peculiar darkness and mischievousness of its own.

Our Lord therefore proceeded at once, without any break, as it seems, in His discourse, to speak of this position of theirs and of the use which they had made of it against Himself, and to the great scandal and disadvantage of the people over whom they were in a certain sense set. He did this in a way less reproachful to them than He might have used, first by speaking generally, and parabolically, and then also by making His discourse directly a description of His own pastoral office, at the same

time that it is a reproof of their neglect of theirs. The discharge of this part of His Mission was a thought which was very dear to His Sacred Heart, as we have already seen, in the manner in which He dwells upon it in His discourse about scandalizing little ones. It was a part of this love of our Lord for the pastoral office which was committed to Him, that He should yearn with inexpressible desire for all those who were in any way to be made partakers of it with Him, and to have a share at once in its responsibilities and in its dangers and rewards. These men to whom He was now speaking had their part and share in the office, for the image of the shepherd is used of them in the Prophets, and there is much there said about the account which such men have to give if they neglect it. This thought sheds a light of its own on the dealings of our Lord with these false shepherds of the flock, who were doing so much to ruin His work among the sheep, for whom He was to lay down His life. He had been ready to take them to His Heart if they had corresponded to His grace, and now they had set themselves in the most violent opposition to Him. He begins by solemnly reminding them of the misery of being shepherds and yet not working in the right way for the sheep. They had made themselves, in fact, enemies instead of friends. They had exercised their pastoral authority to the destruction of the flock, instead of its edification, by their conduct towards our Lord, which had now issued in the excommunication of the man who had been healed. It was fitting that some notice of this act of hostility should be taken by our Lord.

"Amen, amen, I say to you, he that entereth not by

the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up another way, the same is a thief and a robber.” He was Himself, as He explains presently, the door to the fold. But He goes on first to give a picture of the shepherd who enters by the door. “*But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out, and when he leadeth out his own sheep he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice, but a stranger they follow not, but flee from him, because they know not the voice of strangers.*” We are told by some commentators that it is probable that on this occasion also, as on so many others, our Lord had before His eyes something which suggested the picture which is drawn by Him in these beautiful words about the shepherd. It is true that these words must have been said either in the Temple or in some place in Jerusalem. But there may have been folds for flocks in the immediate neighbourhood of the pool of Siloe, near which was the sheepgate, as it was called, and the description itself rather suggests a home for more flocks than one, such as might be found, as elsewhere in the Holy Land, so especially close to the city, to which the shepherds might bring their flocks for the purpose of greater security from the neighbouring mountains.

Even at the present day, travellers in those countries still tell us of the folds surrounded by walls, with a door which is guarded by a special porter, into which the sheep of different shepherds are collected. When the shepherd wishes to take his own flock to pasture, he is admitted by the porter. He calls his own sheep, who know his

voice, he leads them out, and they follow him as he calls them on from time to time. Thus there is no feature in this description which might not have been present to our Lord and those to whom He was speaking at the moment. Both in this description, and in the explanation of it which follows, our Lord dwells mainly on the points which characterize the shepherd whose the sheep are. But He mixes up also points which distinguish the unlawful aggressor on the fold, or the shepherd who is not truly such. Thus the picture which is here drawn puts before them the true shepherd first, and in the second place the circumstances which belong to the false teacher or pastor. He has evidently in His mind the charge which they have made against Himself by their excommunication of the poor man whom He had healed. The false shepherd is he who does not enter by the door, but climbs over the wall some other way, because he knows that the porter will not admit him. He comes in again incidentally in the passage where it is said that the sheep do not know the voice of strangers, and therefore will not follow him. These are the points in the parable in which the contrast is drawn out between the true shepherd and the thief and robber.

"This proverb spoke Jesus unto them. But they understood not what He spoke to them." The thoughts of our Lord were too sublime for their perception. They had never realized their own position as shepherds of souls. They had no idea at all of the tenderness and self-sacrificing love of the Good Shepherd. They had flung at Him the reckless charge which their condemnation of the subject of His recent miracle implied, little thinking of all the

gravity of the accusation, and all the mischief to souls which they imputed to Him, and as little of the true and great weight of their own responsibility. Our Lord therefore went on at once to explain more fully what His parable implied. St. John seems generally to use the Greek word, which is most correctly translated "proverb," in the sense in which the other Evangelists use the word which answers to "parable."

"Jesus therefore said to them again, Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All others as many as have come, are thieves and robbers, and the sheep heard them not. I am the door. By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and he shall go in and go out and shall find pastures. The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill and to destroy. I am come that they may have life and may have it more abundantly." Thus, in the first place, He answers peremptorily and finally the implied charge that He was not a true Shepherd. He is not only a true Shepherd, but He is the door by whom all true shepherds must enter. Their office is but a participation of His, and their power and commission must be derived from Him. There had been persons heard of before who had claimed falsely the prophetic or the pastoral office, and the issue had shown that they were impostors, thieves, and robbers. For the sheep had not heard them, for they had not spoken in the Name of God, nor had the grace of God worked in their hearers to make them accept their teaching. They had not entered by the door, for they had not had admission to the office of shepherd through our Lord in any way. Thus the charge made against our Lord by these Pharisees is retorted against

them. Not only is our Lord a true Shepherd, but He is the only true Shepherd, in the sense that He is the door by Whom all others who are in any way to have a share in the pastoral office must enter in. Those therefore who claimed to be shepherds, and to have the right to denounce Him as an impostor, were by that very fact of their opposition to Him proved out of their own mouths to be impostors themselves, or, if not in the beginning impostors, to have fallen away from their duties as shepherds as far as they had ever been such legitimately, and to be worthy of a place among the thieves and robbers who had preceded them.

"I am the door. By Me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and he shall go in and shall go out and shall find pastures." The language is such as to suit either the shepherd or the sheep. For both the sheep and the shepherd enter in and go out by the door. But it is sufficient to restrain the application to the shepherd himself. To enter in by the door, which is our Lord, is, in the case of the shepherd of souls, both to derive his commission legitimately from Him in the Church and also to follow His example and method of acting and dealing with the flock, and strictly to adhere to the doctrine of salvation as He has left it behind Him. Such a pastor "goes in and goes out," which is the common way of describing the whole course of ordinary life, in the pursuit, therefore, of the avocation to which he is called, and shall find pastures for his own soul and for the souls of those whom he may have to feed.

It is easy to see how much is contained in these few words in which our Lord sums up the blessings

which attend the true pastor, and the abundant helps which are provided him for the discharge of his office. Freedom, safety, protection, security in the exercise of a most fruitful and energetic activity, continued under a great variety of circumstances and conditions, all these are implied in the picture of the shepherd going in and going out, as he wills, while his "finding pastures" seems to embrace the whole range of the means of grace and spiritual refection and enjoyment, which are supplied by the sacraments, prayer, and action of the Holy Ghost on the soul, the strength and light and growth which result from the abundant resources and provisions of the Kingdom of God. The life of the shepherd is thus represented to us as one of great and manifold vigour and interest, as unfolding itself in the practice of a thousand holy virtues and spiritual achievements. The life of the sheep under such guidance and care must correspond to that of the shepherd himself in all this beautiful and rich and secure productiveness, and indeed, as has been said, the language used by our Lord is not limited either to the pastor or to the sheep. On the other hand, there is the part played by the thief, the evil and false pastor, who comes in not by the door, but some other way, not often, but when it suits his fancy or lust. He cometh not but for to steal, and kill and destroy, for his own interests or wants are his only law in his dealings with the flock.

In contrast to this is our Lord's account of Himself. "I am come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly." The spiritual life of the soul was not first given by our Lord, when He came among them in the Incarnation,

because His grace and the merit of His Sacrifice had been working in the world ever since the beginning of its history. All spiritual life indeed is His gift, all light and all grace are from Him. But His own appearance in the world was to bring about an abundant increase of all life, as it had been before, and this abundance was to continue to increase as the mysteries of His Incarnation were worked out more completely, and especially after the Passion, and Resurrection, and Ascension, and the great outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the Church. There was remission of sins, which answers to the giving of life to the dead soul, before. But now it became more full and the means of obtaining it more easy of access. There was spiritual knowledge before. But now it was clearer, deeper, larger, more penetrating, reaching further into the mysteries of the Divine Nature and counsels, the position and the prospects of man, the dignity to which he was raised, and the future which was being prepared for him. It was before possible for man to become holy, in imitation of God, as He had said even to the Israelites, "Be ye holy as I am holy." But now sanctification as far as it is attainable by men, became more perfect, more interior, more intense in its purity, more complete and ripe and heroic in its sublimity. Grace was more abundant, more permanent, and more penetrating in its effects. The liberty of children and heirs and sons of God supplanted the condition of servile and laborious obedience which had been possible of old, and men could feel towards God and one another with more perfect confidence and peace and tranquillity and security. The sanctity which had before been the privilege of

a few of the servants of God, became the possession of countless thousands in every generation of the Church. All this may be contained in the words about the more abundant life which our Lord has come to bestow.

But our Lord has something further to say about Himself in the character of the Good Shepherd, something of which He had not before spoken in this connection, even when He was describing the shepherd leaving his ninety-nine sheep safe in the fold, and going in search of the one sheep who had strayed. He had spoken of it in another connection when He had forewarned the Apostles of His coming Passion. He had spoken to them of the death which He was to suffer, but not of the purpose for the sake of which He was to suffer. Now in the presence of His enemies who were to bring about His death, He mentions the reason for which He was to undergo it, the salvation of the sheep of His fold. "I am the Good—that is the excellent, the perfect, the faultless—Shepherd. The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." In those countries, as we see in the history of David, the shepherds might have to expose their own lives for the saving of the sheep. Thus the idea is not far-fetched or foreign to the subject, and no doubt it was one on which the Heart of our Lord delighted to dwell. And what could more fitly suggest it than the occasion on which this parable was spoken, when our Lord had before Him some of the very men who were to be the human instruments of His death, for the salvation of the world? Their malice had already shown itself in many ways. He had already declared to them that He knew they wished

to kill Him, and now they had added to their former measures of hostility and persecution this new instance of the excommunication of a man on whom He had wrought a miracle, which of itself was enough to convert them.

These words were a secret warning to them that He would not prevent, by any exertion of Divine power, the final accomplishment of the action which they meditated, and which they coloured to themselves with the pretext of zeal for the honour of God and the keeping of the Law. “But the hireling and he that is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and the wolf catcheth and scattereth the sheep, and the hireling flieth because he is a hireling, and hath no care for the sheep.” These words may be understood simply as drawing the contrast between our Lord as the Good Shepherd, and an impostor such as the Pharisees were endeavouring to make Him out to be. Or they may convey a tacit comparison between Himself and the Pharisees themselves, who certainly had no true care or love for the sheep committed, in a certain measure, to their charge, who would not exert themselves to help them in the smallest things, or to bear the burthens which they laid upon them, as our Lord afterwards said of them. Much less, therefore, would they have risked their lives for the sheep. There is this twofold reference running all through this passage—the defence of our Lord Himself, by showing how differently He was disposed towards the sheep from any one who was an impostor, and also the contrast between Himself and the enemies who were attacking Him and denying His title to be

considered a lawful shepherd of the sheep of God. But He seems to dwell far more lovingly on the sacrifice He is Himself to make and on the love which He is to display for His sheep, than on the other side of the picture. He goes on in the following verses to draw out this truth concerning Himself still more fully.

"I am the Good Shepherd and I know Mine and Mine know Me. As the Father knoweth Me and I know the Father, and I lay down My life for My sheep. And other sheep I have that are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd." Here it may be said that our Lord gives four proofs that what He says about the Good Shepherd is true, four characteristics which are found in Himself, and which mark Him out as the Good Shepherd. In the first place He knows His sheep, and in the second place His sheep know Him. He compares this mutual knowledge of Himself and His sheep to the knowledge whereby His Father knows Him and He knows His Father. The third mark of the Good Shepherd is that He lays down His life for His sheep. And the fourth mark is that He has other sheep which are not of this fold, and that He is to show His care and love for these distant or wandering sheep by bringing them home, and making of them with the others one fold under one shepherd.

Our Lord has already said, in His description of the relations between the sheep and the shepherd in the opening parable from which all this passage depends, that the shepherd knows his sheep and calls them by name, and they know his voice. The

present passage, therefore, is an expansion of the former, only that here the characteristic of the shepherd is allied to our Lord. He knows His sheep with a knowledge far surpassing that which any ordinary shepherd can possess of the sheep of his flock, even though it is not impossible for this ordinary knowledge in certain cases to be far more intimate than we might suppose it to be. Shepherds ordinarily know their sheep by some external sign, but it is probable that great familiarity and loving care of their flock may give them a peculiar and individual knowledge which others would hardly believe to be possible. But in any case our Lord knows His sheep, and especially those who are in an especial manner His own by the love of pre-dilection with which He regards those who are to be nearest to Him in Heaven, with a penetration and intimacy which far surpass any human knowledge.

His knowledge of them is a knowledge most fruitful in its results and effects, because He knows them for the purpose of the most special and tender and intelligent protection and guidance over each individual soul, and for the purpose of bestowing upon them, in the largest possible measure, gifts of grace and light in proportion to their capacity and faithfulness, His bounty being guided by His knowledge as well as prompted by His intense love for them. And His knowledge of them is not limited to this or that time or moment in their history. It includes the most compassionate fore-knowledge of all their failings or trials or sufferings, the indulgence He will have to show them, the pardon He will have to bestow upon them, and the

final blessing of their perseverance and their crowns and glory with Him in Heaven. And He knows them before they come to Him and while they are yet unborn—there is no time at which they are or have been strangers to the everlasting love of their Creator and the Shepherd of their souls. Such is that knowledge of the sheep on the part of our Lord which corresponds to that first characteristic of the Good Shepherd which He has mentioned.

He goes on to say His sheep know Him. Their knowledge of Him corresponds to the capacities of the intelligent nature which He has given them, which is made for the possession of God in ways of its own, and to the gifts of grace with which He increases the resources of that nature, and also to their experience and knowledge of Him in His dealings with their souls. This knowledge of Himself on their part is His great delight, for it repays Him, in the manner in which it is possible that creatures can repay their God, for all that He has done for them in the order of nature and in the order of grace. Their knowledge of Him leads them to trust themselves to Him, to believe His truth, to give Him the perpetual homage of their service and honour and reverence and worship, and also that perpetual intercourse with Him in prayer and supplication and contemplation which is most dear to His Sacred Heart. This is what answers, in the relations between our Lord and His own, to that knowledge of the shepherd by the sheep of which He had spoken in the parable at the beginning. He adds to these words a comparison between this knowledge and that wherewith His Father knows Him and He knows His Father. "As the Father

knoweth Me and I know the Father." It is not that there can be complete resemblance between these knowledges, for on the one side there is the mutual knowledge of two Divine Persons, and on the other the knowledge between our Lord, a Divine Person, and that which His sheep have of Him. But there is a resemblance which is not one of equality. The Father knows the Son as God, and communicates to Him by His knowledge all His own substance and essence. He knows Him also as Man, and endows His Sacred Humanity with gifts and blessings, and powers of every kind. As God, the Son knows the Father, His essence and substance and Person, and all that He has Himself received from Him. He loves Him in return, but does not communicate anything to Him, for the Father receives from no other Divine Person. As man our Lord knows the Father by intelligence and the fulfilment of His will, by working for His honour and making His Name known and glorious.

Thus our Lord is known by His elect, who receive all gifts from Him, and who in return glorify His Name and imitate His example, and the like. Moreover, the immense knowledge and love that exist between the Father and the Son are the fountain and cause of the knowledge and love with which our Lord regards His faithful, and they regard Him. The Divine and increase love is the fountain of all love human and created. So also the Father desires and wills that our Lord should love men with immense love, as such love exists between the Father and the Son. The Father desires through His Son to adopt men as His sons, to give them a share of that filiation which

properly belongs by right to the Son alone, but the imparting of which to men who receive Him is the great object of the Mission of the Son in Human Nature. This love of the Father for men is communicated to and shared by the Sacred Humanity.

The third mark by which our Lord here proves Himself to be the Good Shepherd, is that He lays down His life for the sheep. He seems to have before His mind the passage of Isaias, ‘If He shall lay down His life for sin, He shall see a long-lived seed.’² As has been said, it is not unprecedented, for shepherds, in such countries as that in which our Lord spoke—for Judæa, as distinguished from Galilee, was a pastoral country as compared with an agricultural country—to be called on to expose their lives for the safety of the flock committed to their charge. But in no case of the kind could any shepherd make a sacrifice of his life which could be compared to that of the Good Shepherd for the redemption of the world. For no such death can ever redeem souls, nor can it even be efficacious in securing the deliverance of the flock from temporal dangers. But our Lord’s Sacrifice saves from eternal death, the true death of the soul. It is also a complete sacrifice of a life which would not have been liable to death but for our sakes, that it might be laid down for the sheep. Whereas any other life that is given for any other cause, however good and great, and with whatever generosity, is only a life cut short before its time. The sacrifice of such a life for another may benefit ourselves, but the sacrifice of the life of our Lord was altogether beneficial to us and not to Himself.

² Isaias liii. 10.

The fourth mark follows, namely, that our Lord has other sheep who are not of that fold, that is, of the Jewish nation. All men were His sheep originally, for before the time of Abraham there was no separation, no peculiar nation chosen by God as His own. Thus nothing can destroy the right by which the whole race of mankind belongs to our Lord as their Creator and as their promised Redeemer, by the promise made immediately after the Fall to the progenitors of all mankind. The Gentiles and the whole race of man from the beginning of time to the end of the world, are thus the sheep of the Good Shepherd. But in that day they were sheep which lay at a distance from Him, and from the small and cherished fold which contained the children of the chosen people. Our Lord now says that it is a part of His work as the Good Shepherd to fetch home these outlying sheep, and make them one with the others, that there may be one fold and one Shepherd. "Them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd." He was not to do this in His own Person, but in the persons of His Apostles and preachers. But they have all their power and all their grace from Him, it is His voice which men hear, it is His grace which moves the souls of the hearers as well as guides the tongues of the preachers. The fold is His, and it is One because it is His, and is ruled by the one shepherd, the Supreme Pontiff, through whom our Lord governs them on earth, as He has used the voices of the Apostles and other Apostolic men in place of His own, to bring home to the one Fold the wandering sheep.

The words which follow may be considered as explaining an apparent difficulty which might be founded on what He has said, namely, that He was to lay down His life for the sheep. How was this consistent with the following sentence, in which He had said, that He had other sheep, and He must bring them, and that there should be one fold and one Shepherd? If the shepherd laid down his life, how could he bring home other sheep to the fold? Perhaps our Lord rather took occasion from this difficulty to speak of His Death as voluntary, and as to be followed by His Resurrection. For it was well that these truths, which the Jews could not then understand, as even the Apostles did not understand them, should be frequently spoken of, even though the language would not be yet intelligible. His words would rise up in the minds of the Apostles and their disciples, after they had been fulfilled. And the fact that He had hinted at so much which He had not explained, might lead them on to loving contemplation of many other truths belonging to this rich outpouring of His love as the Good Shepherd. Such would be all the wonderful arrangements in His Kingdom for the nurturing and guarding His sheep by the sacraments and means of grace, and especially that excess of love of which no other shepherd could be capable, of not only giving His life for His sheep, but of feeding them upon Himself after He had died for them.

He says therefore that there is another and a special cause of the love of the Father for Him, which consists in this, that He lays down His Life, as He has said, for the sheep. He does this there-

fore out of love for His Father and to please His Father. The direct answer to the difficulty is contained in the further statement, that He lays down His life that He may take it up again. "No man taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself, and I have power to lay it down and to take it up again." For our Lord as God, a Divine Person, united to Himself the Body and Soul of which the Sacred Humanity consists, and He had power to separate them by death when He chose, and He had power to reunite them by resurrection when He chose. When He died, He could have enabled His Sacred Humanity to resist still longer the sufferings of the Passion. Thus He lay down His Life, and brought about the separation of the Soul from the Body, in which death consists, of His own will and power. So when He chose to rise again from the dead, He reunited the Soul and the Body by His own power, neither Soul nor Body having been for a moment separated from His Divine Person. Thus His Death did not put an end to His power of caring for His sheep, for whom it was endured by Him, nor did it prevent Him from gathering in the sheep of the other fold, as He speaks, and making one fold and one Shepherd. The whole of this work for the sheep is the object of the most tender complacency of the Father, and a special cause why the Father loves Him, because all is done by Him out of love and obedience to the Father, as He goes on to say, "This commandment have I received of My Father."

These words of our Lord, which contain the reason for the immense joy and resolution with which, as we have seen, He was always looking

forward to His Passion and the fruits which were to be its result, contain also most directly the doctrine of the command laid upon Him to die for the salvation of mankind. The command laid upon Him as Man extended to all that was a part of the work of salvation, such as His preaching, His miracles, and the like, and thus we find Him so constantly alleging the precept and command of His Father as the reason for what He says and does. Thus St. Paul speaks of His whole life as a life of obedience, as well as of all other exemplary virtues, and says that "He became obedient even unto death, the death of the Cross."³ Obedience implies a precept, and the theologians give more than one reason for this precept. They say that it was fit that God should show His immense love for man, by laying this command on His Incarnate Son. It was fit that our Lord should repair, by obedience especially, what had been ruined by the disobedience of Adam, and show also to the very utmost His own virtue of humility by dying for us because this was specially enjoined upon Him. Thus also He gave us the most perfect and consummate example of this blessed virtue, and made His Death on the Cross, which seemed to be the sentence of justice on a malefactor, the highest act of virtue, because it was the highest act of the fulfilment of the will of God. The well-known passage of St. Paul to the Hebrews,⁴ describes our Lord at His first entrance into the world, that is, at the first moment of His conception, when the Divine union was perfected in the womb of His Blessed Mother, as offering Himself especially for

³ Philipp. ii. 8. ⁴ Hebrews x. 5—7.

the accomplishment of this decree of God. It was then that this command was made known to the Sacred Humanity of our Lord by the infused knowledge with which it was endowed, and that as Man He accepted it with the most perfect conformity and resolution to carry it out to the uttermost. Thus when our Lord's words here are carefully considered, they contain within their meaning the whole doctrine of His Divine Person and of His Sacred Human Nature.

Of course the Jews to whom He was speaking, did not understand Him. "A dissension therefore rose again among the Jews for these words." They were designing to bring about His Death, and here He was talking of laying down His life for His sheep, and of taking it up again at will. We see in the few words in which St. John relates the incident, the traces of the obstinacy and obduracy which had for some time marked their treatment of Him. They could not explain His miracles, and yet they could not deny them. So they had to take refuge in their former calumny, of which we shall soon hear again, of His having collusion with the devil. "And many, of them said, He hath a devil and is mad. Why hear you Him?" The shortest way out of their difficulty was to set Him down as unworthy of all attention, and to bring Him to death. "Others said, these are not the words of one that hath a devil." The calm majesty and heavenly sweetness of His words were in themselves utterly inconsistent with the theory of diabolical agency. And besides, the power shown in the miracle surpassed that which was allowed to the devils. "Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?"

Here the Evangelist leaves them, for His next verses belong to a period of the year considerably subsequent to that of the feast of Tabernacles. St. John has now completed his plan of giving us a general summary of the chief incidents of this most remarkable visit of our Lord to the Holy City. The historical value of these chapters of the fourth Gospel is almost incalculable. They not only fill up a gap in the story, as is the case with almost the whole of this Gospel, but they furnish a key which enables us to understand more clearly the exact position of our Lord at this time with relation to the authorities, to explain the history which immediately follows, and also, as has been hinted, the state of mind of various classes of the people.

CHAPTER III.

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

St. Luke x. 25—37; *Story of the Gospels*, § 100.

[ST. LUKE here passes to a series of anecdotes and instructions, between which there does not appear to be any certain connection with regard to time or place. It seems obviously to be the aim of the Evangelist to give us in this series a collection of teachings of our Lord, belonging all to this period of His preaching, and all generally connected with Judæa as their scene. But he does not think it necessary to trace our Lord's footsteps from place to place, with the same exactness as we find in some parts of His Galilæan preaching. In all this part of St. Luke's Gospel there are but few notes of particular places, although it is indisputable, from the general colouring, so to speak, that the incidents must have occurred in Judæa. We have come to a part of the history of our Lord in which the narrative is far more concerned with what He taught than with what He did, and this remark applies even to His miracles, of which, as has already been said, we have but very few in this portion of the third Gospel. It is quite possible that St. Luke, according to his wont, follows accurately the course of time in every single particular in these chapters, but it does not seem all

important to insist on this. We may safely assume that the whole of what is here related belongs to this period, when our Lord was preaching first in Judæa, and afterwards, for some time, in the region of Peræa. The first incident of this collection is certainly important enough to have been placed first, even if it did not precede the others in point of time.]

“And behold a certain lawyer stood up, tempting Him, and saying, Master, what must I do to possess eternal life? But He said to him, What is written in the Law? How readest thou? He answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself. And He said to him, Thou hast answered right. This do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbour?”

There are naturally various opinions about the intention and spirit of this lawyer or scribe. Some think that he asked the question in malice, in the hope of leading our Lord into some compromising statement, in the same spirit with the priests at Jerusalem, when they had brought to our Lord the woman taken in adultery. Others see in his conduct and in his language no reason for doubting that he asked the question in perfect good faith, like the young man a little later, who asked a very similar question. We must not let ourselves be led astray by the language of our version, and indeed of the Vulgate, in which the word which answers to “tempting” seems to imply a bad intention. This Greek word, with its compounds, does not of neces-

sity mean more than to "make trial" of a person. Thus when our Lord asked St. Philip the question about the procuring of bread for the five thousand, St. John says that He did it for the purpose of "proving" Philip, for our Lord Himself knew what He would do. There could have been no malice in our Lord's question, yet the Greek verb in that place is the verb of which one of the compounds is used in this place for the question of the lawyer. Some questions may be asked for the simple purpose of information, others for the purpose of entangling the person who is interrogated, others for the purpose of leading him into a contradiction, and exposing his ignorance, and others for the object of eliciting from him a declaration on some point which is at the time a subject of controversy and dispute. It appears that in the time of our Lord there was a common controversy as to the class of commandments in the Law which were to be considered the greater, a controversy which some schools settled in favour of the ritual and ceremonial part of the Law, while others maintained the supremacy of the moral precepts. This seems to have been the reason for the question afterwards asked of our Lord on an occasion which is sometimes confounded with this, when He was asked what or of what kind was the greatest commandment. But we do not seem now to have to do here with a moot question of this kind. There is no reason, unless it be conveyed in the use of the word tempting, of which we have already spoken, for supposing that the question of this lawyer was asked maliciously. Our Lord does not treat the questioner as He sometimes treated those whom He wished to baffle, and the answer

given by the lawyer in his turn was perfectly sound, and was praised as such by our Lord. There may be a difficulty raised as to the second statement made by St. Luke concerning him, namely, that he asked the second question, for the sake of which and of our Lord's answer thereto it is probable that the whole incident is related here, "being willing to justify himself." But with regard to this expression of St. Luke we may speak presently.

The answer given by the lawyer is taken from two passages in the Pentateuch, and it shows his intelligence and study of the sacred writings that he should have combined them. The first part of the answer is found in the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole strength." The rest is found in the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus: "Thou shalt love thy friend as thyself." In the original Hebrew, the word which we read as "friend," following the Vulgate, is translated by the Septuagint writers by the Greek word which means "neighbour." There is thus no difference between the texts, except that in the passage before us the description of the manner of loving God which is enjoined is fourfold and not threefold, the word which is represented to us by the word "mind" being left out. The answer shows that this scribe was on the side of those who settled the question between the moral and ceremonial parts of the Law in the Christian way. He had the texts ready to his mouth, and we may suppose that the real difficulty which pressed him was the question which he goes on to ask, as to the extent of the

commandment concerning his neighbour. It is not needful in this place to enter upon a detailed explanation of the fourfold division of the love of God.

It may be enough to say that the love of God with the whole heart must mean the direction of the whole will with perfect singleness of aim to God, as the one supreme end of life; the love of God with the mind must signify the subjection of the whole range of the intellectual powers and faculties to Him as the supreme truth; the love of the soul should be understood as the service of Him by all the parts and operations of the soul as distinguished from the spirit, which embraces therefore the regulation of all the sensitive and natural powers in His service; while the love of God with the whole might or strength must represent the use of all the powers of soul and body alike, of which operations the whole of our external life is composed. Having said thus much, we may add that the precept of this perfect love of God can be adequately and perfectly fulfilled only in the case of the blessed in Heaven, when the final glorification of the body shall have completed the adoption, as the Apostle speaks, of the children of God. For there alone will this positive precept be fulfilled in all the extent of which it is capable. Nevertheless, it can be fulfilled and has been fulfilled by the saints on earth and in this state of pilgrimage, in that there has been in them no positive violation of the precepts by the use of the faculties of heart and will and affections and intelligence, or memory, or intention, or of the bodily powers and members, which has been directly contrary to the love of

God, although there may have been some deficiencies and shortcomings from all that might have been done for the love of God.

Our Lord answered the lawyer with loving courtesy and encouragement, "*Thou hast answered well, this do and thou shalt live.*" He must have been speaking of the eternal life concerning which the lawyer had put his question. And then the inquirer came to what, as has been said, was probably the real question in his mind, his conscience perhaps troubling him with doubts as to the limitation of neighbourly love which was commonly taught, or at least practised, by the Jews. "*But he, willing to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbour?*" His desire to justify himself does not in any case imply that he wished in any bad sense to ensnare or tempt our Lord. It can only mean either that he felt in himself some self-reproach for not following out this commandment in its fulness, or that he wished to learn of our Lord the way in which he might make himself more perfect in justice by its observance. For the word to "justify" has this sense naturally, and does not only mean to make out a person as innocent against some charge explicit or implied, but also to make him just by an increase of inherent virtue, such as might be gained by any one who learnt from our Lord's teaching some more lofty path of justice.

The parable in which our Lord has conveyed His answer to the question of the lawyer, is one of those in which He has chosen, by a marvellous contrivance of Divine wisdom, to instruct us at once as to our simple practical conduct and at the same

time, to set forth, for the benefit of the Church in all ages, the deep theological grounds on which the virtue which He is enforcing is based as its foundation. There is no particular in the parable in which we may not find this sublime theological teaching, while, at the same time, the narrative is so simple and touching that its practical import can escape no one. Thus we find that there is scarcely one of all our Lord's parables that is better known, and, to a certain extent, as to its direct teaching, more easily understood than this. At the same time, we also find that when the theologians of the Church seek to apply passages and words of Scripture or of our Lord's teaching as recorded therein, to the illustration of such theological truths as the effect of the Fall on man and the remedy applied to those efforts by our Lord in His Incarnation and Passion, they can find few passages in which these truths are more accurately and fully illustrated than that which is now before us.

"And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, who also stripped him, and having wounded him, went away, leaving him half-dead. And it chanced that a certain priest went down the same way, and seeing him, passed by. In like manner also a Levite, when he was near the place and saw him, passed by. But a certain Samaritan being on his journey, came near him, and seeing him, was moved with compassion, and going up to him, bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and setting him upon his own beast, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day, he took out two pence, and gave to the host and said, Take care of him, and whatsoever thou shalt spend over

and above, I, at my return, will repay thee. Which of these men, in thy opinion, was neighbour to him that fell among the robbers? But he said, He that showed mercy unto him. And Jesus said to him, Go, and do thou in like manner."

The picture which our Lord here sets before us, like the rest of those which are contained in the parables of this last period of His teaching, is taken as to its whole scenery and all its incidents from the part of the Holy Land in which He was now teaching. Between Jericho and Jerusalem lay a long desert, gradually sinking from the Holy City itself till it reached the level of the Jordan banks near which Jericho was built, which lay about six hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean, and therefore a good deal more below the position of Jerusalem. Although the country immediately about Jericho was rich and luxuriant in its fertility, the road towards Jerusalem soon came to pass through a wild and desert track, which was well known as the haunt of robbers, and the scene of many murders. The traveller, therefore, who was robbed, stripped, wounded, and left half-dead by the wayside, was no figure which those acquainted with the district could find any difficulty in imagining. It is probably that cases of the kind here described were constantly occurring. The primary object of the banditti was to secure the property of the travellers whom they waylaid, but resistance naturally led to a struggle, in which they would not scruple even to take life, whether for the sake of possessing themselves of their booty, or of ridding themselves of the chance of pursuit and punishment. In this case they robbed their victim, took

away even his clothes, and left him grievously wounded to die.

The next feature of the narrative is the treatment which he received at the hands of the priest and the Levite. Our Lord probably did not mean us to understand that the priests and Levites, as a class, were less inclined to mercy and compassion for their "neighbours" than others. He may have meant to turn the attention of the "lawyer" to the hard doctrines which prevailed among the class to which he himself belonged, who might easily have found reasons for releasing men from natural obligations, as we know that they did in the case of the duties of children to parents by means of their doctrine concerning "Corban." The priest and the Levite might find grounds for their negligence, in the absence of any positive written obligation of putting themselves to serious inconvenience, and even to possible danger, by the exercise of charity towards the dying traveller. They might not be certain that he was one of the chosen people, they might be engaged on some mission which was connected with their sacred office, they might say that they were unable to spare either the time or the money which the care of the wounded man would involve. They had their own journey to accomplish in safety, they were not in their own homes and so bound by the laws of hospitality. When we consider the circumstances of opposition and persecution from, at least, the chiefs of the ecclesiastical class at this time, it seems not impossible that our Lord may have meant to add this line, representing their hardness and unmercifulness, to the many others in which He had drawn their picture for the

instruction of His disciples. In any case, the priest and the Levite must have been among those to whom the rest of the people would naturally look for instruction and example as to the question which this lawyer had proposed. It is clear that if their teaching was to be gathered from their conduct, the poor half-dead victim of the robbers was not a "neighbour" of theirs in any sense which brought them under the commandment which enjoined on them to love him as themselves.

Our Lord draws a complete contrast to their conduct, and to their doctrine as exhibited in their conduct, in the picture of the Samaritan traveller. When we say that He draws the contrast Himself, we must qualify what is thus said by reminding ourselves, that here, as in the case of several other descriptions which occur in His parables, He may be relating actual facts, of which His Divine insight into men's hearts and His perfect knowledge of all that passed in the world might give Him the cognizance. Thus what He tells us about the unjust steward, or the unjust judge, or the rich man and Lazarus, or the Pharisee and the publican, may be founded on actual occurrences, and in the present case, the priest, and the Levite and the Samaritan need not be simply creations of the imagination. But putting this aside, as there may have been a Divine reason for the mention of the priest and the Levite, so also our Lord may have had a special purpose in the introduction of the Samaritan as the person, who, in the words of the lawyer, showed "mercy" to the poor sufferer by the wayside. The Samaritan, according to the common Jewish doctrine, could not have been a "neighbour" to the

sufferer—supposing him to have been a Jew—and the sufferer would not therefore have had a right to his assistance according to that interpretation of the Law of which there was now question. The priest and the Levite would have had an obligation over and above that which might be incumbent on Jews in general, because they were ministers of God and, in some degree, pastors of the people. The Samaritan would have had an exemption from the obligation, over and above any that others might claim on the grounds already mentioned, because he was himself outside the Law, and would not have been treated by the Jews as included in the rights which it conferred any more than in the obligations which it imposed. If he was bound at all, as he undoubtedly, in the mind of our Lord, was bound, it was by a more universal meaning of the Law than that which the Jews recognized, the meaning which recognized the universal brotherhood of men as the children of the one God and the descendants of one common human father. If his heart was moved by compassion which the others had not felt, it was the product of the law of nature, of which the Mosaic Law had been the republication and more formal promulgation, by which its principles were not so much introduced into the world, as insisted on and sanctioned anew. It had been given to the whole race of Adam from the beginning, and was thus binding on all the race, whether included in the special vocation of the chosen people, or left outside that special vocation. Thus his conduct in itself, if it was prompted by anything more solid than the simple tender feeling of sympathy for suffering, was an evidence of what St. Paul calls the law written in

the heart, which speaks by the voice of conscience, and enjoins actions which are based on the great original principles of human morality, principles sometimes forgotten by those who live by a strict external rule, without the interior principle of devotion or charity or duty. For the exact observance of formal exterior religion, which took up so much of the time and attention of the priests and Levites, may often be consistent with great hardness of heart, unless accompanied and kindled into life by the interior spirit.

The actions which were prompted, in the case of the Samaritan, by this interior law, are minutely described by our Lord, as if to show more completely the contrast on which He insists. "Seeing him, he was moved with compassion," although the Levite and the priest both had seen him, and passed him by. "And going up to him," leaving the road in order to assist him, "he bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine," which it seems were often used in this way in the East. He is described as if he had with him all the appliances that could be needed, as if to show the greatness of the diligence with which he relieved him. "And setting him on his own beast," which he must therefore have given up to him, "brought him to an inn, and took care of him." He therefore stopped on his own journey for the sake of devoting himself to the care of this stranger. But this was not enough for his charity. He stayed with him the remainder of the day, and "the next day, he took out two pence," two pieces of money sufficient for the probable expenses of his cure, "and gave to the host, and said, Take care of him, and whatsoever thou shalt spend over and

above, I, at my return, will repay thee." The charity was therefore perfect in kind and degree, including personal service and labour and expense as well as simple compassion, and also the tender provision for future needs which might arise after the Samaritan himself had been obliged to proceed on his way.

Some difficulty has been raised in consequence of the form of our Lord's answer, in which He appears not so much to meet the question, "Who is my neighbour?" as to correct the spirit in which the question itself may have been put, by the example of the Samaritan, who did not ask himself whether the sufferer lying before him was a "neighbour" or not, whether he were or were not of his own race, and the like, but showed that he considered him as having a claim on his compassion and service by the mere title of his suffering, or at least of his being a man like himself. Perhaps the question, "Who is my neighbour?" implied a narrow and exclusive view of the relationship spoken of, at least wherever there was occasion for active exertion and labour in behalf of those in whom that relationship existed. Perhaps there were questions of this kind agitated in the schools of the Scribes, as there could hardly fail to be as to a matter of so much practical importance, and perhaps this lawyer was in the habit of hearing distinctions made in answer to such questions which did not quite satisfy his conscience. In such a case our Lord might well give a reply which struck at the spirit in which such distinctions may too often have been made.

On the other hand, it must be remembered that

our Lord does not seem to hint at this inversion of the question of the lawyer, when He says simply, after putting forward the narrative of the parable, "Which of these three, in thy opinion, was neighbour to him that fell among the robbers?" And perhaps it is unnecessary to insist on the difficulty which has thus been raised. For the relation of neighbour, like that of brother, is essentially a double one. We are neighbours to those who are neighbours to us. If the Samaritan was neighbour to the wounded man, the wounded man was neighbour to the Samaritan. What our Lord's words imply is the question, Which of the three acted as a neighbour to the man who had fallen among robbers, and thereby showed that he understood his own relation to him and the obligations which it involved? And in this question the true answer to the question of the lawyer is involved. The priest and the Levite were not neighbours to the sufferer, therefore in their judgment he had no claim on them by the title of neighbourhood, or if he had, that claim was superseded by the circumstances of the case, whether as regarded him or as regarded themselves. For some reason or other, he was not their neighbour in the sense of the precept that they were to love their neighbour as themselves. They may have drawn the line so to exclude all whom they did not know to be Jews, or they may have drawn the line so as to excuse themselves under certain particular circumstances, as they did with regard to the natural and Divine law of honouring parents in the case of the Corban. The Samaritan's interpretation of the precept did not admit of any such distinctions. The man by the

wayside was his neighbour, even though he may not have been of the same race. And even though he himself might have had many reasons for pleading that, under the circumstances, he was not bound to stop and recognize the claim, at least not to recognize it at such a cost, by showing mercy to him, the Samaritan showed himself a true neighbour, and at the same time proved that the man on whom he showed mercy was his neighbour in the true sense of the commandment of the Law.

There was the common nature and origin which made them brothers, for they were both children of the Heavenly Father and of one human ancestor. The needs and sufferings of the one called on the resources and powers of the other, and these were the measure by which the active love enjoined by the commandment was to be limited, or rather let loose without restraint. The Samaritan loved his neighbour as himself, because he measured his service and help simply by the requirements of the sufferer and by his own powers of relieving them. The Son of Sirach says that God in the beginning, "gave to every man charge concerning his neighbour,"¹ and it was this original commandment, founded on the truth, that, as St. Paul says, "God made of one all mankind to dwell upon the whole face of the earth,"² which was the foundation and principle of the conduct of the Samaritan.

In this way, therefore, as we see, the question of the lawyer as to the true basis of the claim of neighbourhood was answered, and nothing more was required to guide his conduct aright than this simple principle loyally and lovingly applied. When

¹ Ecclus. xvii. 12.

² Acts xvii. 26.

our Lord set before the lawyer the whole of the treatment of the wounded man by the Samaritan, in all its details, it is clear that every word which He said found an echo in the heart of His hearer. It may have been an unusual thing for charity to be so tender and manifold and thoughtful in its manifestations, but the charity of the Samaritan did not go beyond the instincts of all who felt themselves God's children, placed by Him in the society which He had created, and their membership of which involved the duty of brotherly love. In this sense we find St. John speaking of this duty as an old commandment, for, as he says, they "had it from the beginning."³ It was, in fact, the commandment which was renewed by Moses, when he bade the people love their neighbours as themselves. But, at the same time, we find our Lord calling it a "new commandment,"⁴ and speaking of it as His own commandment, because He gave it the motive of His own most perfect example, and by means of the Incarnation supplied a new foundation for its obligation, as well as fresh impulses and aids of grace to enable us to fulfil it properly. And, at the moment at which He made His answer to the inquiry of the lawyer, He could not but have had in His mind what He was about to do in this respect.

This consideration may serve to throw a new light on the picture which our Lord has here drawn of the charitable action of the Samaritan. The original of the picture is our Lord's own compassion upon us in becoming Man for our sakes, and in doing for us all that He has done in the dispensation

³ 1 St. John ii. 7.

⁴ St. John xiii. 34.

of the Incarnation. He is Himself the Good Samaritan. But it is here as elsewhere, when our Lord speaks of His own love and condescension to us. That is, He hints at what He has done, rather than describes it. He gives a few features, but He leaves the most touching and tender of all the manifestations of His charity to be drawn out by others rather than by Himself. So it is when He draws the picture of the Good Shepherd, or of the Father of the Prodigal, or of the Householder, or of the Lord rewarding his servants for their faithfulness. His own language is inadequate as a representation of the truth, as if He chose always to leave much unsaid about His own goodness. Thus we find it to be in the picture of the Samaritan. He is a "certain Samaritan on his journey." They had but lately at Jerusalem called Him a Samaritan as a title of reproach, and He had not answered the charge. Now He takes on Himself the name of the outcast nation. He is on His journey, but He does not tell us that He became a Man for our sakes, that His journey is from no less a place than Heaven, that He is sent by His Father into the world to redeem it by His Blood, and that the end of His journey is His return to Heaven, after having opened its gates to us by His Death. This is but the first of a series of reticences. For the description of the traveller who was in so evil a case is a very faint account of the state of man, who had fallen into the hands of his spiritual enemies, fiends whose malice and hateful power so far exceed any human malignity, who have brought about his Fall, wounding him grievously even in his natural powers, and tearing away from him all the rich gifts of grace

and knowledge with which his nature had been enriched by the pure bounty of God, Who had created him in great beauty and power, and then had added the preternatural treasury of graces which he had received in the state of original justice in Paradise. The description in the parable leaves all this to the Christian imagination.

The Samaritan comes to this poor sufferer, as it were, by accident, but in truth our Lord set out on His journey for no other object than to save us. The journey of the Samaritan involved no loss or humiliation, whereas the Incarnation involved in our Lord the most stupendous condescension, the emptying of Himself, the making Himself nothing, and more than nothing, in the infinite abasement of the Passion to which it led. And the binding up the wounds, pouring in oil and wine, may be taken as representing the cleansing and healing effects of the graces administered in the Incarnation. But what wounds inflicted by robbers who leave a man half dead, can represent the foulness and misery of sin and its effects, or what cleansing and healing by the most effective resources of the physician can answer adequately to the purifying and life-giving sacraments and the other means of grace in which the fruits of the Incarnation are stored us? It was no doubt an excess of charity in the Samaritan to give his own personal service in the case of the wounded man, to set him on his own beast, and conduct him to the inn. All these details are added in by our Lord for the purpose of hinting at the details of His own action towards us. But, after all, they supply hints which but very faintly represent the magnificent and intense charity to which they

refer. The wine and oil cost the Samaritan little, but it is the lifeblood of our Lord that was required for our healing.

It would take many long considerations to draw out all the depth of meaning contained in the truth that it is our Lord Himself Who tends us in the dispensation of the Incarnation. Beside and beyond all that He alone could do in redeeming us, satisfying for us, purchasing us pardon and grace and the title to Heaven as the sons of God, there is His tender action in dealing with each individual soul one by one with a marvellous wisdom and love, which we shall never understand until all things are made known. There is His careful personal guidance in bringing home to us, one by one, the persons and the occasions and the opportunities and the means of good, the presence and action of which make up our spiritual history. The setting "the wounded man on his own beast" represents very faintly indeed the sacrifice for and to us of Himself, His whole Human Nature, as the ransom of our captivity, the discharge of our debt, the support of our life, the purchase of our eternal bliss. The inn is not an inn, but a Home, the abode of God Himself, the Holy Catholic Church. He must find some way of representing in the parable the truth that, in the Church, our Lord, for His own most loving purposes, chooses to guide us and tend us and feed us and guard us by means of others who represent Him, though He is Himself ever present in them, the life and strength and light of all their ministrations. And thus it is that He adds that beautiful incident of the charge which is given by the Samaritan to the host of the inn, who sets before

us the whole hierarchy and army of persons and things, consecrated or not, to whose charge He commits us, or on whom He leaves us to lean, in order, among other reasons, to the cultivation of mutual love by means of mutual services received and paid, and in order also that there may be room for the exercise of virtue, the use of graces, the faithfulness in the discharge of the commandment concerning one another which characterizes this dispensation of His as well as all others, and also for that great joy and delight to Himself and to us which will have their place when He comes again to repay whatever has been done for His sake, and in the discharge of functions committed to us or others by Him. Thus the whole picture of the Samaritan's dealings is best accounted for, by considering that our Lord had before His mind His own action in relieving our miseries with all the tender and thoughtful charity which is displayed in the Kingdom of the Incarnation, at so great a cost to Himself, and with so many wonderful inventions of His wisdom, and that this was in His mind when He bade His questioner, "Go, and do thou in like manner."

CHAPTER IV.

THE PARABLE OF THE WATCHFUL SERVANTS.

St. Luke xii. 35—59; *Story of the Gospels*, § 107.

OUR Lord had been speaking of the necessity of labouring only for the Kingdom of God, and now passes by a natural transition to that of being always ready for what will bring it home to us, namely, the coming of our Judge, which by the disposition of God is to be at a time which is always uncertain. To us the Kingdom of God comes home at our death, to the world at large it comes with the second Advent of our Lord in power. Both these events are kept secret from us and from all men as to the moment at which they will occur, and the natural inference from this fact is that we must be always ready for Him, whether it be for His final coming, or for His coming to each one of us at his death.

“Let your loins be girded and lamps burning in your hands, and you yourselves like to men who wait for their lord, when he shall return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching.”

The image used by our Lord is not difficult to understand. The girding of the loins is used in Scripture to signify more than one kind of prepara-

tion. There is the girdle of mortification, the girding of the loins which is customary with travellers when they are about to start on a journey, there is the girdle or belt of the soldier, which is a necessary part of his armour, and there is the girding which represents active and diligent work in many various ways. Thus we may say that men must first have their loins girded by the mortification which conquers the passions and subdues the rebellion of the lower appetites, then by that which is required in order that they may march onwards rapidly in the path of perfection, then by that which enables them easily and readily to do battle against their spiritual foes, and lastly by that which makes them energetic and active in every kind of good work. The other image, that of lights burning in the hands, gives a picture of readiness in its utmost perfection, for men light lamps when they expect any one at night, but they only take them in their hands when they think that their expected guest is at the very door, and they wish to go out to meet him. The two images in conjunction are explained in the familiar homily of St. Gregory,¹ in which he speaks of the girding of the loins when the body is kept under by mortification, and adds that it is not enough to refrain from evil, we must also do good, and therefore light up the lamps of good example for the benefit of our neighbours.

Another line is added to the picture by the words in which our Lord says that we are to be like servants expecting their lord, that they may open to him at once the moment that he knocks. For in this we have the element of love and devotion added. For

¹ St. Greg. *Hom. in Evang.* xiii.

the servants must be supposed to be eager to welcome their lord, especially as he is returning from his wedding, and therefore on an occasion of the greatest joy to him and to them. And then He gives the very beautiful promises which express the love and eagerness with which He will reward the good servants.

"Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching. Amen I say to you, that He will gird Himself and make them sit down to meat, and passing will minister unto them."

No earthly master would behave in this way. It would be enough if he took care they should want for nothing that could make the occasion one of happy enjoyment to them after their faithful watching. But our Lord introduces the altogether new feature of the lord waiting upon his servants, changing places with them, and this in no perfunctory or incomplete manner, but setting himself as earnestly and seriously to the work of making them happy as if it were his only and natural business in the world. This is no exaggeration as regards God. For He will Himself be the personal source and cause of the happiness of the saints. He will employ upon that happiness all His wisdom and omnipotence, and their blessedness will only be limited by the capacities of their nature and by the measure of the merits of each, reckoned according to God's own scale of munificence in rewarding. And the feature in the picture in which He is represented as passing and serving them, illustrates not only what has been already said about His personal agency in all the process, but also the truth that they have each their

particular merits, both in kind and in degree, and that He will exercise the most minute justice in rewarding each one according to his deserts, both in kind and in measure also.

“And if He shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, blessed are those servants. But this know ye, that if the householder did know at what hour the thief would come, he would surely watch, and would not suffer his house to be broken open. Be you then also ready, for at what hour you think not the Son of Man will come.”

Some writers note that our Lord does not speak of the last of the four watches into which the night was divided, as if those who do not make themselves ready to meet their judge until very late in life had comparatively little chance of setting themselves right at the very last. Our Lord then changes the image He is using, from that of the servants expecting the coming of their lord, to that of the householder who takes care to fortify his house against danger from the assaults of thieves and robbers. In such cases it is the object of the thief to approach at a time when he is not expected, and the object of the householder to know if possible at what hour he may come. And, if he cannot know this, it is his wisdom to be always ready, in order that he may not be found unprepared. So our Lord thus represents Himself as coming like a thief in the night, speaking almost as if it were His wish to find us at a time when we do not expect Him. He speaks in this way for the sake of warning us how very easy it is for us to be off our guard, and how constantly it is the case that, when He actually comes, men are not on the watch and not prepared

to meet Him. And as a matter of fact, even those who are the best prepared to die, by the great care which they take of their souls day after day, are still often called to meet Him when they do not expect Him. There is something about the circumstances of the moment which draws their thoughts off, and this is often a great mercy with people for whom a sudden but not an unprovided death is the choice of God. So He puts it absolutely. "Be you then also ready, for in what hour you think not, the Son of Man will come." There is a special grace in being ready, though unwarned, a faithfulness which our Lord loves to reward in a way of His own.

It will be noticed that some of the instructions contained in the part of the Gospel of St. Luke which is now before us are addressed, as it seems, to the disciples in general, some rather to the multitudes who were not as yet far advanced in the school of our Lord, and some more particularly to the Apostles and Apostolic men who might have to labour and to suffer almost like the Apostles. In many cases the words of the Sermon on the Mount are repeated, and we know that that great discourse was addressed to men who had already made considerable progress as disciples of our Lord. The counsel of selling what they possessed and giving alms might be thought to be confined to such as these last. On the other hand, there was much in the teaching of this time, as given by St. Luke, which must be considered as general, and especially the instruction about being always ready for the coming of the Judge. It must be obvious that all men are bound to be prepared for a matter of so much importance, which is the

private and individual concern of each single soul. Then again our Lord had just said something about the householder taking care to guard his house against the thief, and this image seems to convey the idea of one who is responsible for others as well as for himself. Thus the question of St. Peter is not unnatural. "*And Peter said unto Him, Lord, dost Thou speak this parable to us or likewise to all?*" For they had already been placed in some kind of charge over others who were to be their disciples, as they themselves were the disciples of our Lord. The question gave our Lord an occasion of speaking to them of the responsibilities and also the special rewards, of those who were in any way sharers in the commission of the Christian pastorate. Without exactly answering the question, He in His own gentle way lets St. Peter and the others see that they have very grave duties, which may involve an immense reward if they are well discharged, and bring on them most serious chastisement if they are neglected.

"And the Lord said, Who thinkest thou is the faithful and wise steward, whom his lord setteth over his family, to give them their measure of wheat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom when his lord shall come he shall find so doing! Verily I say unto you, he will set him over all that he possesseth. But if that servant shall say in his heart, My lord is long in coming, and shall begin to strike the men-servants and maid-servants, and to eat and to drink and to be drunk, the lord of that servant will come in the day that he hopeth not, and at the hour that he knoweth not, and shall separate him, and shall appoint him his portion with unbelievers."

Thus we have in the first place the commission given to such as the Apostles, and in particular to

the Chief of the Apostles, which is expressed afterwards at the time of the collation of the keys to St. Peter in the Divine words, “Feed My sheep, Feed My lambs.” Our Lord here describes it as the appointment of a faithful and wise steward over the family, whose business it is to give them their portion of wheat in due season. The portion of wheat must be the daily food of the family, in the Word of God, the Christian doctrine, and the administration of the sacraments, and other means of grace. This is the Apostolical commission, of which St. Paul says, that a necessity lieth upon him, and woe is unto him if he preach not the Gospel!² The “dispensation,” as he afterwards calls it, is first of all to St. Peter, the chief shepherd of souls, in the place of our Lord, then to the other Apostles and the whole hierarchy of the Christian ministry in union with him, and in dependence on him. And of this our Lord here says, using the same word as in the foregoing parable, “Blessed that servant, whom when his lord shall come he shall find so doing.” And it is to be noted in the second place, that the reward of the faithful steward is something different from and greater than the reward He had spoken of in the parable. “Verily I say unto you, he will set him over all that he possesseth.” It is not merely a banquet in which the lord waits on the servant whom he finds watching when he comes, but it is a power and an authority conferred on him over all the goods and properties of his master. We see the truth of this in the belief of the Church, that the saints reigning in Heaven do not merely enjoy ineffable happiness. They are also formally intrusted with power and rule by which

² 1 Cor. ix. 16.

the Church on earth profits greatly, in accordance with the arrangements of God.

Our Lord, having thus made a magnificent promise to the faithful and wise stewards, goes on to set out the truth of the responsibility of prelates in another way, namely, by speaking of the terrible chastisements which may await stewards who are unfaithful or foolish. “But if that servant shall say in his heart, My lord is long in coming, and shall begin to strike the men-servants and the maid-servants, and to eat and drink, and be drunk, the lord of that servant shall come in the day that he hopeth not, and in the hour that he knoweth not, and shall separate him, and shall appoint him his portion with unbelievers.” Here the beginning of declension in the steward is traced to forgetfulness of or inattention to the duty of watchfulness. “The servant says in his heart, My lord is long in coming.” The constant sense and expectation of the day when he is to be called to an account die away. Then follow idleness and indifference to duty, self-indulgence, which leads on to hard treatment of others, sensuality, and finally excess. And our Lord goes carefully into details as to the punishment of such conduct.

In the first place, the negligent servant will be taken unawares by the time of his death. “The Lord of that servant shall come in the day that he hopeth not, and at the hour that he knoweth not.” The two sentences are not exactly identical in force. For it is one thing not to expect the day at which our account is required of us, and another not to know the hour. A person may be struck with sickness or by some accident on an unexpected day, and yet he may have some time left him with the prospect of

death before him, and with the free use of his faculties and the opportunity of availing himself of the means of grace which are so powerful in reconciling men to God even at the last. It is something more terrible to be caught when we do not even understand that the last hour has come. That then is the first part of the chastisement, a sudden and unprovided death. The next part is that the poor culprit will be separated from God. "And He shall separate him, and appoint him his portion with unbelievers." That is, that he will have to suffer the pain of loss and the pain of sense as well. He will be treated as an unbeliever. The words remind us of the saying of St. Paul to St. Timothy,³ "If any man have not a care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." For as faith is the formal ground of salvation, so infidelity and unbelief are the foundations of damnation.

Our Lord proceeds to enlarge on the subject, which has been laid open to Him by the question of St. Peter. With all the Christian ages before the eyes of His mind, He could foresee both the immense benefits which His people were to receive from the care of diligent and faithful pastors, and also the mischief to the flock of the Church which was to result from the shortcomings and mistakes and unfaithfulness of those to whom that precious charge was to be committed in His Name. He had already spoken of the reward of the faithful and prudent steward, and of the punishment of the unfaithful. Between the two extremes of faithfulness and negligence as thus described by Him in

³ 1 Tim. v. 8.

the parable, He would see the enormous number of those who were to be intrusted with the pastoral charge, who might be found in the day of account to have been more or less unfaithful to the requirements of their high calling, without perhaps deserving to be entirely and for ever separated from their God. He might also see the very different recompences of pain or detention from the vision of God, or even banishment from Him entirely. And in His great love for all those to whom this great commission is intrusted, the greatest than can be placed in the hands of mortal man, He dwells in detail on these various cases. "*And that servant who knew the will of his lord and prepared not himself, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. And unto whom much is given, of him much shall be required, and to whom they have committed much, of him they will demand the more.*" Here we have our Lord's own declaration of the danger of the prelature in His Church, and at the same time of the strict justice with which the penalties of which He speaks are administered, exactly in accordance with the merits of the case.

If we wish for a Scriptural commentary on such words, we might turn to the first chapters of the Apocalypse, where the Bishops of the seven Churches of Asia are addressed by our Lord as Judge. Those Churches were then in their first fervour, their Bishops may have been Saints, and one of them as it seems was St. Timothy, the beloved disciple and companion of St. Paul. Yet, if we go through the sentences, as they may be called, which are passed

on these seven Bishops and their Churches in the second and third chapters of the Apocalypse, what do we find? The first Bishop is St. Timothy of Ephesus, as has been said. He is praised indeed for his works, his patience, his labours and endurance. "But I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first charity. Be mindful therefore from whence thou art fallen, and do penance, and do the first works, or else I come unto thee and will move thy candlestick out of its place, unless thou do penance." The words may be understood of the Churches as well as of their rulers, but they are still severe, and it may well make any one tremble to think that even the beloved disciple of St. Paul was threatened with the removal of his candlestick.

The second "angel" on the list is the Bishop of Smyrna, and he is not blamed in anything. The third is the Bishop of Pergamus, and of him also it is said, "I have against thee a few things." It is the same with the fourth, the Bishop of Thyatira. The fifth is the Bishop of Sardis, and he is threatened in words which seem almost taken from the passage before us in St. Luke, or from the discourse which it relates. "I know thy works, that thou hast the name of being alive, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, and be ready to die. For I find not thy works full before God. Have in mind therefore, and do in what manner thou hast received and heard, and observe and do penance. If then thou shalt not watch, I will come to thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know at what hour I will come." Then follows the Bishop of Philadelphia, and he is highly praised. "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and

hast not denied My Name. . . . They shall know that I have loved thee, because thou hast kept the word of My patience. I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon the whole world to try them that dwell upon the earth." And the last is the Bishop of Laodicea. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and made wealthy, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind and naked. I counsel thee to buy of Me gold fire-tried, that thou mayest be made rich, and mayest be clothed in white garments; and that the shame of thy nakedness may not appear, and anoint thy eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see. Such as I love I rebuke and chastise. Be zealous therefore, and do penance."⁴

Here we have seven of the servants of God spoken to by our Lord as to their actual spiritual state, and certainly the verdict pronounced upon them is not altogether lacking in severity. Even with the saints there is some fault to be found, and we may surely think that these seven are fair specimens of the rulers of the Church, the stewards and ministers of the Word and of the sacraments, who have to give an account of the souls committed to their charge. Our Lord's language may be applied to all souls, but in the passage before us in St. Luke He certainly seems to be speaking especially to prelates and others in authority. And if we consider the judgment which He may have to pass on still less pardonable dere-

⁴ Apoc. ii. iii.

lications of duty than those which are there actually mentioned, it is easy to imagine that when our Lord looked forward to all that was to be of this kind in the history of the coming ages, the prospect before Him may have been dark indeed. There must have been before His mind many indeed against whom He had not a few things, many who had not even the name of being alive, but who were dead spiritually and openly, to the immense scandal of the whole world and the enormous detriment of the Church, many who were in a worse state of tepidity than the Bishop of Laodicea, many who would never listen to the voice which called on them to do penance, and cover their poverty and shame in the white garments of justice. The language of these sentences shows the keen and exact discrimination with which account will be required of the rulers of the Church, and, of course, of each one of us with regard to his own stewardship of his own soul. It may fairly be taken also as showing how much there is ordinarily in those who have to give an account to our Lord of which perhaps they have hardly any suspicion, which may yet bring upon them the very severe animadversions of their Judge. It is not wonderful therefore that our Lord should have been moved to extreme earnestness by the considerations suggested by this question of St. Peter, and have taken the occasion to utter in many various ways His warnings about watchfulness.

“And unto whom much is given, from him much shall be required, and to whom they have committed much, of him they will demand the more.” The distinction in these two sentences seems to lie between what is given to men as personal gifts in the way of

grace, or spiritual strength, intellectual powers, or opportunities of advancement in the knowledge of God, and in all virtue or in fruitfulness, on the one hand, and the external charges or particular offices in the Church, such as the care of souls and graces given for her service, on the other. Thus St. Paul was most singularly gifted by God, and raised immediately on his conversion to a very high state of spiritual greatness, while at the same time he received the commission to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, and to be the teacher of the whole world for the benefit of others. He had therefore to give an account of both classes of gifts received, both those which belonged to his own sanctification, and of those which belonged to the doctorate of all the nations.

CHAPTER V.

THE PARABLE OF THE FIG-TREE.

St. Luke xiii. 1—9; *Story of the Gospels*, § 108.

THIS parable must be considered as part of the context to which it belongs. St. Luke gives it us in connection with a series of instructions on watchfulness, a part of which has already been given in the preceding chapter. The Evangelist then subjoins our Lord's remarks on the incident of the massacre of the Galilæans, whom Pilate had ordered to be murdered at the very time of their sacrifices, and the news of whose tragic death had been brought to Him, as it seems, while He was teaching. “And there were present at that very time some that told Him of the Galilæans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answering said to them, Think you that these Galilæans were sinners above all the men of Galilee, because they suffered such things? No, I say to you, but except you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower fell in Siloe and slew them, think you that they also were debtors above all the men that dwelt in Jerusalem? No, I say to you, but except you do penance, you shall all likewise perish.” This is enough to explain the context.

“He spoke also this parable. A certain man had a fig-tree planted in a vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the dresser of the vineyard, Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none. Cut it down, therefore, why cumbereth it the ground? But he answering said to him, Lord, let it alone this year also, until I dig about it and dung it. And if happily it bear fruit, but if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.”

The direct purpose of the parable is easily discerned. It represents the constant forbearance and patience of God in dealing with souls, or with bodies of men such as the Jewish Synagogue, to whom He has intrusted graces and blessings, and from whom He expects fruit. He does not at once destroy them for their unfruitfulness, but after a time He will bear no longer. And our Lord implies that it belongs to the teaching on which He was at that time engaged, that men should be warned that it might be the case with them, that the last time of trial had already come for them, after which the patience of God would bear with them no longer.

It is hardly possible not to see in this parable a most significant reference to our Lord's own dealings with the Synagogue, and especially with the authorities of the Temple and of the Holy City. He had been three years preaching to the people, at first mainly in Galilee, but in each of these three years He had come in person to the Temple. He had been present at the first Pasch, as we call it, at the outset of His Ministry. He had been present at the second Pasch, that is, at the feast which is mentioned in the fifth chapter of St. John. He had not been present at the third Pasch in His Ministry, but He had visited Jeru-

salem for the great feast of Tabernacles, and since that time He had been mainly occupied in preaching in Judæa itself. This then was the last chance, so to speak, allowed to the people of Judæa and Jerusalem, and if this opportunity was neglected, nothing remained for them than that which was actually to happen to them when, in chastisement for their murder of their King and Messias, their city and nation were overwhelmed in a destruction which had no parallel in the history of the world. And there seems moreover to be a clear connection between these words of our Lord and His last recorded miracle before His Passion began, that of the withering of the barren fig-tree, to which He went up as if to seek for fruit, although the time for figs was not yet, and cursed it with the terrible words, "Let no fruit grow upon thee for ever." Of this connection we may speak hereafter.¹

¹ See the Appendix to this work.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PARABLE OF THE GUESTS AND THE SUPPER.

St. Luke xiv. 1—35; *Story of the Gospels*, § 111—113.

[ST. LUKE next gives us an account of what passed on a certain Sabbath, when our Lord was invited to a meal in the house of one of the chief among the Pharisees. The place in which this occurred is not specified. It may perhaps have been in Peræa, and the miracle which St. Luke relates may have been chosen by him because it was in a different part of the country from that on the woman “with a spirit of infirmity.” St. Luke may have gathered this and other anecdotes during his sojourn in the Holy Land, and may have added it to the former miracle because it would show him that our Lord’s doctrine concerning the question of the Sabbath had so much importance in His eyes that He repeated it everywhere, in Jerusalem, in Galilee, in Judæa, and in Peræa also. On this occasion our Lord seems to have been invited with something of a purpose on the part of His entertainer, who may have heard complaints against Him on the score of the observance of the Sabbath, and have desired to see for himself how matters really were. For the Evangelist adds that they were on the watch. All the incidents of this day are described with a fulness

which makes us very grateful to the persons from whom he received his information. We must omit here the first of these incidents, the miracle on the dropsical man, and pass on to the instructions given to the host and the guests.]

"Again, He spoke a parable also to them that were invited, marking how they chose the first seats at the table, saying to them, When thou art invited to a wedding, sit not down in the first place, lest perhaps one more honourable than thou be invited by him, and he that invited thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place, and then thou begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when thou art invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, that when he who doth invite thee cometh, he may say to thee, Friend, go up higher. Then shalt thou have glory before them that sit at table with thee. Because every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

It would seem that the occasion was one on which there were a number of invited guests, chiefly, we may suppose, Pharisees like the host. It was left to them to choose their own places at the table, and our Lord observed them as they came in, taking what appeared the best places. The parable, as St. Luke cites it, was a gentle reproof of this way of acting, on account of its folly. It showed a certain amount of pride and selfishness, and was an index of interior qualities in the heart which might expose men to great dangers. For it might be taken as showing that such people would put themselves forward for honour and distinction in other more important matters, ambitioning and

seizing positions for which they were unfit, and in which they might do great harm to themselves and others, and incur great disgrace thereby. What our Lord points out is that it is the Providential rule of the ordinary government of human affairs that those who exalt themselves shall be humbled and those who abase themselves exalted. This rule He illustrates by what might happen on occasion of any great banquet, such as a wedding-feast, in which the host would not leave the places at the table unallotted, so that if the best places were occupied at random by the first comers, those who had thus seated themselves first might have to undergo the public humiliation of being sent down even to the lowest place at the table. This was not a wedding-feast, but the evil desire of self-exaltation was shown in the conduct of those to whom our Lord spoke, indirectly reproving them for their display of selfishness, and putting His teaching on the ground of simple impolicy, which made the reproof less severe.

This was the spiritual alms which our Lord then gave to these guests—containing a doctrine far deeper and more important than they suspected. For it is indeed the way of God in His Providence to be constantly humbling those who exalt themselves, and exalting those who humble themselves, striking down the boastful and proud, even when to all human appearance they have reason to trust in the stability of their position. Thus prudent and thoughtful men are at once alarmed for their friends, when they see in them anything of pride and arrogance, because they expect that Providence will bring about their humiliation in the eyes of the world. For it is a part of God's rule to keep men

alive to the danger of self-exaltation, and the manner in which this Divine object is accomplished varies indeed from time to time, and yet the object is inevitably attained. Thus God did not strike the wicked King Herod, of whom we read in the Acts, though he had slain one Apostle and imprisoned another with the intention of putting him to death, until he had listened with complacency to the words of his flatterers, who said, "It is the voice of a god, not of a man." All history is full of examples of the same rule, which was recognized even by the heathen, as we see in poets like Æschylus. But our Lord had in His mind a deeper meaning for His parable. For He was thinking of the spiritual Kingdom of God, in which this law of the exaltation of those who humble themselves and the humiliation of those who exalt themselves is invariable, in which the highest graces are won on the condition of self-abasement, and the greatest falls and ruins ensured by self-elation and pride.

Having thus fed the souls of the guests, our Lord added a special counsel to the host who entertained them. He did not reprove him for his entertainment, but, in the same gentle and almost playful way, He suggested a Divine rule of conduct which would certainly be of immense benefit to him. It would raise his thoughts to heavenly interests, which perhaps he had never dreamt of advancing in the way now suggested by our Lord. It would make him look to the employment of any ample means which he might possess in a manner which would be a greater exercise of charity, and so secure for himself a reward in the next world instead of in this.

“And He said to him also who had invited Him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy kinsmen nor thy neighbours who are rich, lest perhaps they also invite thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and thou shalt be blessed, because they have not wherewith to render thee recompence, for recompence shall be made thee at the resurrection of the just.”

What is meant is not that there are to be no entertainments among friends of equal means, kinsmen, neighbours, and others. For these have their part in the arrangements of society as such, and are good for the cultivation and increase of mutual charities and friendly offices. But it is meant that it is far better that money should be spent in charity on those who are in need or in misery, and who have no earthly means or opportunities of returning the kindness. Even in society it would not be well to entertain others for the sake of being entertained and feasted in return. For all such entertainments must have a higher motive than selfishness. But even good people in the world seldom consider what an opportunity of grace and even of prudence is open to them if they will use their riches in the way of charity. We shall soon speak of the steward who was commended by his lord for making a clever, though unjust, use of his opportunities to secure himself friends, and our Lord, when He gave that parable, told His disciples to make themselves friends of the mammon of iniquity. What He now recommends to His host is practically the same, to consider the most ordinary employments of time or of the kindly use of wealth as occasions which may be

turned to the benefit of his soul, to understand the immense field laid open to him in the Providence of God by the existence on all sides of him of so many different forms of human misery, a field by the working of which he might so easily secure to himself treasures and helps of incalculable richness and efficacy. Blessed indeed are those who have the good things of this world at their disposal, and who understand, as holy David says, concerning the poor and needy. Still more blessed those, whether rich or poor, who learn to labour in every action of their lives to gain something for the Kingdom of Heaven, and to do something that may be recompenced in the resurrection of the just.

It would almost seem as if St. Luke had been able to gather a complete narrative of what passed on this Sabbath, either from the Pharisee who entertained our Lord or from some one of the company present. He has already told us of the miracle on the dropsical man, of our Lord's question to the Pharisees, of the healing the poor sufferer before Him, and of His words explaining the doctrine of the Sabbath. He has added what our Lord said to the invited guests, and the instruction which He gave to the host. This man may afterwards have become a disciple, and may have delighted to relate to the Evangelist all the incidents of this remarkable day. There are little touches in the story which make us think that it may have been originally related by an eye-witness, and the insertion of the instruction given to the host makes it probable that it came from him. In any case St. Luke has more to tell. Very likely the entertainment proceeded happily and joyously, as was natural after the work-

ing of so beautiful a miracle. Our Lord must have been the centre of all eyes wherever He was, and His gracious and sweet discourse must have spread out a soft atmosphere of peaceful and holy thoughts all around. And so it seems that the guests themselves were led on to speak of the things of God. This gave our Lord an opportunity of adding a further head of instruction, into which He was able to throw a note of warning, being already master of His audience and sure of their goodwill.

"When one of them that sat at table with Him had heard these things, he said to Him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." The remark was evidently suggested by our Lord's words about the recompence at the resurrection of the just. It is as if he had said, Yes, indeed, to be admitted to the feast then to be made would be a blessing well worth toiling and spending for. And then our Lord was able to go further in the doctrine which He was teaching, and to add to what had been said in the merciful though severe warning contained in the Parable of the Great Supper. He seemed to tell them that it was indeed a blessed thing to eat bread in the Kingdom of God, and that there would be no lack of invitation to that blessing on the part of God. But still there would be many excluded from that blessing by their own act, who would be invited and who would refuse. Here again the fault is laid to men's own slothfulness, dulness, heedlessness. They will be so engrossed in worldly and temporal matters, as to have no attention to give to the call of God.

"But He said to him, A certain man made a great supper, and invited many. And he sent his servant at

the hour of supper to say to them that were invited that they should come, for now all things are ready. And they begun all at once to make excuse. The first said to him, I have bought a farm, and I must needs go out and see it, I pray thee, hold me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to try them, I pray thee, hold me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. And the servant returning told these things to his lord. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the feeble, and the blind, and the lame. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said to the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. But I say unto you, that none of those men that were invited, shall taste of my supper."

It would seem, in the first place, that the great supper of which our Lord here speaks must be that "eating of bread in the Kingdom of God," of which one of the company had spoken to Him. That is, the great supper is the blessed feast of the eternal joys in the presence of God and our Lord, in the company of all the angels and saints, and the great multitude of the redeemed. But, as the invitation of God in His Kingdom is not simply to Heaven, but to Heaven by means of the faithful use of grace on earth, we may well extend the meaning of the banquet to that feast of God which consists in all the various gifts of grace which are offered to us in the Church, all that God has prepared for us by the right use of which we may gain the future glories. This feast is prepared of old from the beginning of

the world, for there never has been a time when any child of Adam could not reconcile himself to God by penitence, faith, and the use of whatever means of grace were open to him. But the feast of the Gospel is said to be prepared and ready, when the whole system, by means of which the fruits of the Precious Blood are brought home to the souls of men, is arranged and thrown open in the Church as the result of our Lord's Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension. Those who gave in their faith and submission to our Lord before that time, under whatever dispensation, may be said to have been invited and to have come in as far as possible, and thus they enjoyed the fruits of all that had been or was to be done by Him. In a special way the preaching of the Gospel by our Lord Himself was the announcement to the invited that they should come, for now all things are ready.

We must always remind ourselves that our Lord was now speaking to the Jews, and especially to those in authority among them, who, in relation to the Gentiles, were the first and original guests invited to the Gospel banquet. In this sense our Lord Himself may be considered as sent to announce the supper, and, after Him, the Apostles and preachers of the Church who spoke in His name. He had now been nearly three years preaching among them, and the result had been as the parable tells us, that the men invited would not come to the supper. "They began all at once," that is, one as soon as the others, "to make excuse." The Fathers see in the three excuses of which mention is made a reference to the three-fold concupiscences which keep men from closing with

the invitations of God. There is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life. Otherwise, there is the love of sensual pleasure, and the love of money and possessions, and the solicitude of earthly cares and business, which are like the thorns which choke the good seed in the Parable of the Sower. The pride of life may be put with the love of possessions, the concupiscence of the eyes with the engrossment of secular cares, the concupiscence of the flesh with sensual pleasure. All the objects which are thus set before men as the satisfaction of their hearts and minds are things in themselves not forbidden in the right degree. So there was no sin in the man who had bought a farm or a field, no sin in the man who had bought five yoke of oxen, no sin in the man who had married a wife. Yet our Lord makes the first two excuse themselves courteously, and the third not so much excuse himself as bluntly refuse to come. They preferred these things to the supper to which they were invited, and to the favour of the lord whose invitation they disregarded. One class of men, figured in the first of the three, are too fond of property and position to care for the things of God, another class is too much devoted to temporal cares, and another class loves bodily pleasure so much as to have no care for the best interests of the soul. This last class, represented by the man who says he has married a wife, and so cannot come, is in this respect worse than the other two, because engrossment in carnal delights not only shuts out the care for spiritual things, but it deadens and brutalizes the soul even more than the other concupiscences.

It may be said that if our Lord is speaking, in the first instance, of the rejection of the invitation of God by the Jews and their rulers, it might be expected that He should attribute their blindness and obstinacy to motives other than those of the three common concupiscences. It might be expected that He would speak of their pride and self-seeking, the worldly and political motives of interest which made them so anxious that the state of things, in which they found themselves so much considered, so well off as to all material interests, and which made them enjoy so much influence with the people, should not be interfered with and endangered, as might have been the case if they had encouraged the movement of the multitude to put their faith in Him. But, as a matter of fact, it is a truth of experience that these common concupiscences are at the root of all such action as theirs. The great need of these men was repentance and conversion, such as might have been theirs if they had sincerely made themselves disciples of St. John, and so fit for the reception of the Gospel truths. And thus the picture which paints the generality of mankind in their resistance to grace is a true description of them also, and of their resolute indifference to the teaching which might have brought them within the reach of their salvation, the first-fruits of which would have been a humble docility to the Divine Teacher Himself.

In any description of the dealings of God with men in human language and imagery, there must always be something left out on account of the inadequacy of the vehicle in which the representation is conveyed. In the case before us no human

image can convey any true idea of the richness of the banquet which God has prepared for those who will accept it, nor, again, of the misery of those who do not close with the invitation, nor, again, of the dignity of Him Whose offer is so contemptuously neglected. All these are elements in the state of things which is represented in the parable, which the parable itself can only leave untouched, to be understood by those who can fill up the picture, to some extent, for themselves. Yet these explain the severity with which these men are dealt with, by explaining the crime which they commit when they turn away from the offers made them. They are not in any sense independent of God, as the invited guests may have been of the lord in the parable. They do not understand that the invitation is a most loving command from One Who has a right to command, they do not understand what they decline, and at what danger to themselves they decline it. Thus there is more reason in the indignation of God against the Jews, and others like them, than in the anger of the lord against the invited guests. But our Lord does not dwell on this any further than to make the lord say at the end of the parable that not one of them shall taste of his supper. The main point on which He now insists is the immense love of God for the souls of men, and His burning desire that His banquet shall not have been spread in vain. The lord of the banquet sends out once and again, but not to entreat them who have rejected his overtures to enter into themselves and withdraw their refusal.

There is something in the counsels of God which resembles some action of this kind. For we find in

a later parable that He is represented as sending over and over again to the wicked husbandmen, and at last sending His Son. But here our Lord puts forward the other aspect of the truth. The lord turns away at once from the invited guests. He sent first into the streets and lanes of the city for the poor, the lame, the feeble, and the blind. Then, when there was still room, he sends outside, the highways and hedges must be searched, men are to be compelled to come in, that his house may be filled. It matters not that those who eat of the banquet are the poor and the feeble and the blind and the lame, or even strangers to the city, wayfarers, wanderers, outcasts. The banquet-chamber must be filled, and filled with men who had not been invited and then rejected the invitation. If we are to understand by these first invited guests, the Jews to whom our Lord was now preaching, it is natural to look to those who were not Jews as represented by those who are brought in to supply the forfeited places. These, in the parable, are said to be of two classes. First, there are dwellers in the city, but poor, feeble, blind, and lame, men who had no position or capacity to fit them to be the guests in such a feast. These are brought in, and the servant tells his lord that there is still room for more. The second time he is sent forth, this time outside the city, into the highways and hedges, which are to be ransacked for guests.

It is natural that we should seek in the history of the Gospel Kingdom for classes which may answer to those two sets of men. Some writers find them in the nations more or less neighbouring on or connected with the holy people, in the first

place, and in the more remote heathen nations in the second. We may remind ourselves that in the later centuries of the Jewish dispensation there was always a large class of persons gathered round the Synagogue who did not belong to it, those heathen "fearers of the Lord," as they are called in the later Psalms. They believed in and worshipped the true God, but they are not strictly proselytes nor bound to the observance of the Mosaic Law. This class must have increased immensely as the Jewish communities were providentially spread over almost the whole Roman and Greek world. We meet with them in the Gospels, in the centurion at Capharnaum and others, we find them in the Acts, in Cornelius and his friends, the first actually Gentile Christians. They furnished, as a matter of fact, large multitudes to the Apostolic Church, indeed that Church may have been said, outside Jerusalem and Judæa, to have been chiefly composed of them. These might answer to the first set of guests gathered in to the banquet from the city itself. But outside and beyond them lay the still larger multitudes of the heathen who as yet had no knowledge of God, and these also were to be gathered in by the preaching of St. Paul and a host of Apostolic men after him. This preaching to the Gentiles, strictly so called, began then, it has continued ever since, and will continue to the end of time, as long as there is any corner in the world, however remote, which has not heard of the name of our Lord. These Gentile nations may answer to the second class of men who are brought in to the banquet, from the highways and the hedges.

Our Lord makes the master of the house say,

"Compel them to come in," and He thus shows the intense eagerness of God for the conversion of sinners. The language suits the lord in the parable, for he might have had power to use force, and the force which he might use could not be complained of when the result of its use was to bring home to men so great a benefit. But it is well known that God never does violence to the human will, which He has created free, and that men are not to be compelled to accept the Gospel graces against their will. In the case of children and others, entirely dependent on their parents or masters, it may certainly be said that their consent is taken for granted, to their own immense benefit, but it is not forced on them against their will. The word which our Lord uses to express the great desire of the master of the house, must thus be interpreted according to our knowledge of the circumstances of the case which is here represented in a figure. The heathen—for it is of the last set of guests that the word is used—may be said to have been compelled to come in by the cogency of the marvellous miracles wrought by the Apostles who preached to them, by the exceeding beauty and simplicity of the Christian faith and doctrine, by the overpowering charity and perfection which they saw in the Christians, by that new and most efficacious weapon, of which St. Paul speaks as "the foolishness of preaching," the Word of God in the mouths of Apostolic men, striking on their hearts as a trumpet-blast which wakes up the sleeping echoes in the cliffs, and by the manifold interior graces which were poured into the souls of those who heard it willingly. The Church alone presents a

home to the soul of man in which it finds itself at peace, and surrounded by means of satisfaction for all its various needs and cravings, its yearnings for light and pardon and grace and security. This is a form of the compulsion here spoken of. And in other ways also God may be said to compel men to come in, by forcing on them a sense of their deep miseries, their poverty in good, their want of spiritual power, and then also visiting their lives with the gentle discipline of chastisements and trials and afflictions and sorrows, to which so many souls will owe their eternal salvation.

The parable closes with the denunciation of perpetual banishment against those who refused the first invitation of the lord. "But I say unto you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper." This represents a feature in the ways of God on which our Lord seems to have desired to insist. It almost appears to be the chief point in the parable, as if answering the exclamation of the guest, "Blessed is he that shall eat meat in the Kingdom of God," by such words as, "Yes, but who of those who have this blessing offered them will accept it?" Just at this time our Lord was evidently most anxious to impress on those who came across His preaching the extreme importance of closing with the graces offered to them. The time of grace was soon to pass away, perhaps never to return. It need not be said that an opportunity once neglected can never be recovered. But all opportunities must be taken when they occur. They pass away, and their return cannot be reckoned on. The men in the parable of whom these terrible words are said, had done more than simply neglect a

most gracious invitation. They had spurned it with something of contumely and of insult to the lord. They had shown that they deliberately preferred other occupations to his feast. To be negligent of God is one thing, and to be contemptuous of God is another. The attitude of the Jews had now become one of contempt, not unmixed with absolute hatred. For such persons there is but little chance of conversion, for their condition, as far as that is possible with men in this world, almost approaches that of the inveterate enemies of God and man.

Thus ends the account given us by the Evangelist of this memorable entertainment. We may fairly suppose that there were many such occasions in the course of our Lord's Ministry, in which the hosts who invited Him were rather ignorant than malicious, good in many ways, ready to learn from Him, though as yet at some distance from the full light. The people whom He met at such feasts would naturally be of very various degrees of virtue and piety, and among them there might be some on whom His teaching and conversation fell like a gentle dew, softening their hearts, rousing up in them whatever there was of good, and touching powerfully the sources of compunction and conversion. The art of Apostolical conversation is one of the most delicate and beautiful of the instruments which God uses for the benefit of souls, and it must have been possessed in its fulness by our Lord, Who clothed all His actions and demeanour and words with the most lovely and gracious affability. There were thousands of homes in the country in which the old traditions of charity and piety must have been the rule of life, and where souls were to be found who

could profit largely from the presence of our Lord. It is a consolation to think how much there must have been in His daily life at a time like this, in which He may have found cause for grateful and loving acknowledgment to His Father.

CHAPTER VII.

PARABLES OF GOD'S LOVE FOR SINNERS.

St. Luke xv. 1—32; *Story of the Gospels*, § 114.

I.

THE LOST SHEEP.

ST. LUKE now passes on to another subject, on which, as we may judge from the whole character of his Gospel, his tender and compassionate heart loved to dwell. He has always been considered as the Evangelist of the Priesthood and Atonement of our Lord, and certainly he often selects incidents and words of his Master which bear upon this aspect of the Mission of the Incarnate Son. In the passage of his Gospel now before us we have as many as three distinct parables or parabolic instructions of our Lord, in each of which the delight of God and of the Sacred Heart in the recovery of the penitent sinner is the chief feature. St. Luke tells us that the words of our Lord which are here recorded were occasioned, as happens so often, by the criticism of His enemies. We have already had more than one instance, in the history of the Galilæan preaching, in which our Lord had

defended Himself against the charge of being too lax in His intercourse with sinners. This had been the case when the blessed Evangelist St. Matthew had been called to the close following of our Lord, and in his joyous gratitude had made a great feast to Him in his house, at which "a great many publicans and sinners had sat down together with Jesus and His disciples."¹ Then He had gently defended Himself by answering to the taunts and questions of the Scribes and Pharisees that they that are well have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. And He had also bidden His critics go and learn the meaning of the Scripture where it was said by Osee, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."² He had complained of the treatment, first of St. John and then of Himself, by the people of that generation, who were like the children in the market-place, finding fault with His Precursor for his austerity and with Himself for His supposed laxity.³ Thus, when St. Luke tells us that, at the time which we have now reached, there was the same criticism made on Him as before, he adds another line to his testimony that the treatment our Lord met with in His later preaching in Judæa was identical in many of its features with that which greeted the earlier teaching in Galilee.

"Now the publicans and sinners drew near unto Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." The words of the Scribes are an echo of the old charge made in Galilee, and we have as yet had no account in this part of St. Luke

¹ St. Mark ii. 15; *Story of the Gospels*, § 40.

² Osee vi. 6. . . . ³ *Story of the Gospels*, § 52.

of any incident which might have occasioned them, such as afterwards was found in the visit to the house of Zacchæus. But the incident of the publicans and sinners drawing near to hear Him was a constant feature in His preaching, as it is always a feature in the preaching of the Church and especially of her saints. The publicans and sinners of the Gospel represent some classes of men who are always to be found in the world, classes who make no pretence to the practices of devotion and religion, and who are in consequence looked down upon by those who make a profession of better and higher things. They are sometimes almost given up as hopeless by the less fervent among the clergy, who may go to them when they are called, as to a bed of sickness, but who generally leave them to themselves. Such men have often within them sorrow and remorse of conscience, promptings to reconciliation with God, the desire of a better life, and much readiness to embrace it, if the door is only opened to them by the charity of those to whom the ministry of reconciliation is committed by our Lord.

But it is one of the privileges of sanctity to have the power of attracting such men, of inspiring them with confidence, and winning them to break the silence that has so long enchainèd their tongues and the winter that has frozen up their hearts. The saints breathe a fragrance around them which seems to invigorate men with the hope of God's mercy, and their gentleness and sweetness, which are reflections of the character of our Lord, can soften the most obdurate as by a new revelation of God's mercifulness and fatherly love. The Heart of our

Lord was all on fire with the love of God and the love of God for man, which our Lord understood as no one else ever understood, and all His words and actions were steeped in the tenderness of His Heart. This explains to us how it is of necessity that the devotion to the Sacred Heart, when practised faithfully by priests, gives them a power over the hearts of sinners, which is peculiar to itself. It seems inevitable that a true devotion to the Sacred Heart must result in a great growth both in knowledge of our Lord and in resemblance to Him, and His whole character and manner, which were endowed with this especial power of winning souls, are thus insensibly communicated to those who have to carry on in the world His work among men.

We need not dwell on the murmuring of the Scribes and Pharisees, with some of whom it had become almost a second nature to find fault with whatever our Lord did and said. Their captiousness is only worthy of consideration as having furnished the occasion of the words of our Lord in reply. But St. Luke seems to mean to draw a silent contrast between them on the one hand, and the publicans and sinners on the other. The publicans draw near to hear our Lord, and the Scribes and Pharisees carp at Him and find fault with Him. The contrast shows us at least how much more difficult it is to convert hypocrites than to convert open sinners. All the attractive elements in our Lord's words and character must have addressed themselves alike to both classes. Each class must have been conscious in the secret of their hearts of the need of reconciliation with God, and it seems wonderful to us that

the Pharisees did not feel as the publicans felt when brought under the winning and consoling influence of our Lord. The truth seems to be that their hypocrisy, against which He so strongly warned the Apostles, made conversion and submission difficult to the one class, while the other was free from this danger. Conversion implied a great public humiliation to the hypocrites, it implied a confession not only of their other sins, but of the imposture which they had been passing off upon the world. When this hindrance of conscious hypocrisy was united, as in the case of many of them, to evil living, or to ambition, or to covetousness and pride, it would produce in them obstacles to conversion which it might be very difficult to surmount.

Our Lord's answer on this occasion was more gentle in tone than when He had been attacked in Galilee. For now He did not blame His censurers for not understanding the Scriptures. His words are rather an effusion of the tenderness of His Sacred Heart, appealing to their own best feelings, and making almost an apology for the conduct which had seemed to them blameworthy. We may gather how full His Heart was of the love of sinners from the fact that He set forth the truths of which He was thinking in three different forms, each one of which has some peculiar feature in reference to the general argument. It is as if His enemies had touched a spring, which set His tongue, as it were, flowing on the subject on which He delighted to feed His thoughts. We must take these three separate portions of His apology one by one, trying at the same time to observe how they are connected with each other, and flow on, the latter from the

former. First we have the parable of the shepherd seeking the wandering one of the flock, then that of the woman seeking the groat which she has lost, and then the long history of the Prodigal Son. In each case the rejoicing, whether of the owner of the lost sheep, or of the owner of the lost groat, or of the father of the Prodigal, is made a distinct and very marked feature in the discourse. Indeed it would not be too much to say that the whole discourse, parable after parable, is directed to this end, the vindication of the tenderness shown to sinners by His Father, of which His own manner and method were the expression. At the end of the third parable, the censurers of our Lord are themselves introduced in the person of the elder son. Thus we see that our Lord is chiefly intent on most gently and lovingly remonstrating with His enemies for finding fault with His conduct in this regard, which He vindicates by parallel cases from common life in the two first parables, and then in the third sketches the tender-heartedness of God for wandering sinners, which was the pattern which He Himself as Man was always following.

“And He spake to them this parable, saying, What man of you that hath a hundred sheep, and if he shall lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the desert, and go after that which was lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, lay it upon his shoulders rejoicing, and coming home, call together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost? I say to you that even so there shall be joy in Heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance.” The argument which our Lord here

uses is of the same character with that of some of the answers about the Sabbath. He had reasoned, then, from the natural kindness with which men would take an ox or an ass on the Sabbath and lead it to water, or save an animal that had fallen into a pit, notwithstanding that the strict letter of the Law forbade all work on the Sabbath-day. And He had drawn a contrast, which enhanced the force of the argument saying, "How much better is a man than a sheep?"⁴ And when a little before this time He had healed the woman who had a spirit of infirmity, He had argued, after speaking of the watering of the ox or the ass, "Ought not this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath-day?" Here the contrast is not drawn out, but it is implied, and our Lord seems to vary the images which He uses for the purpose of setting forth various truths concerning the souls of sinners, which made them so valuable in the sight of God.

The image of the shepherd seeking the one lost sheep would naturally occur to our Lord in the pastoral country of Judæa, in which, as has often been said, His Ministry now lay. Thus it might have been used by Him, as in harmony with the habits and scenery of the place in which He found Himself, as that of the sower and the seed, or the wheat and the cockle, had been used in Galilee. And when He speaks of the ninety-nine as left in the "desert," His hearers would understand that the country thus spoken of was not a desert in the common sense. But it may fairly be thought that He had other and deeper reasons for the use of this

⁴ St. Matt. xii. 12.

image on this occasion. We have already seen how lovingly He dwelt on this image while at Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles. He had now for a long time kept the thought of the Passion deliberately before His mind, the mystery which He summed up in His words about the Good Shepherd giving His life for the sheep. While He was preaching in Judæa during these months of the last year of His Ministry, this may be said to have been the most common contemplation of the Sacred Heart. It was also peculiarly appropriate to the work on which He was engaged, for at this time, more than ever, He seems to have been burning with pastoral zeal, straining every nerve for the application to soul after soul of the merits of His Precious Blood. His love grew in its manifestations as His time became shorter, and in His dealings with sinners at this period He may be said to have illustrated St. John's words concerning Him, that having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

The publicans and sinners, with whom He was now charged with letting Himself be too familiar, were in His eyes the lost sheep of His flock, for the recovery of whom He was preparing to lay down His life. They were outcasts as well as lost sheep. The whole nation despised and, to some extent, socially excommunicated the publicans, who represented to them taxation in its most odious form, as the tribute levied by a foreign government which they could not resist. The Pharisees and priests looked down on those who belonged to the class of sinners. These men who despised them were the very men who ought to have sought them out, for

they were, in fact, the shepherds of the people, now only using their authority to drive them away from the true Shepherd. They were men who incurred the guilt of those shepherds who were so vehemently denounced by Ezechiel the prophet, as when he says, "You eat the milk and you clothed yourselves with the wool, and you killed that which was fat, but My flock you did not feed. The weak you have not strengthened, and that which was sick you have not healed, and that which was broken you have not bound up, and that which was driven away you have not brought again, neither have you sought that which was lost, but you have ruled over them with rigour and with a high hand, and My sheep are scattered because there was no shepherd, and they became the prey of all the beasts of the field, and were scattered."

And still further the Prophet goes on, after denouncing the crimes of the shepherds, and their rejection, to prophesy in words which our Lord may well have had in His mind: "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I Myself will seek My sheep, and will visit them as the shepherd visiteth his flock in the day when he shall be in the midst of his sheep that were scattered, so I will visit My sheep, and will deliver them out of all the places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day."⁵ And now with regard to these lost sheep, that had taken place which is figured in the parable, for they had been lost, sought out, found, and brought home in triumph. If He ate and drank with them, as He had done once at the feast of St. Matthew, and would do again soon in the house of Zacchæus, that was

⁵ Ezech. xxxiv. 3—5, 11, 12.

but a poor figure indeed of the manifestation of joy which took place in Heaven at their conversion. They might feast Him and entertain Him after their poor rough coarse fashion, but with hearts full of the sincere love of the true penitent. He would accept their hospitality, join in their festivities, hallow their banquets, such as they were. For His Heart was full of ecstatic joy, and in its expansiveness and love of sympathy, He would call on all Heaven to rejoice and give thanks with Him.

Our Lord's Sacred Heart is so full of joy that He paints in a figure, in the circumstances of the parable, the details of His labours and His triumph. He speaks of the man who leaves ninety-nine out of a hundred sheep in the desert, to go in search of the one sheep that has strayed. He speaks of how he treats it when it has been found, not driving it before him or even leading it, but carrying it home on his own shoulders. And then follow the other circumstances of his calling together his friends and neighbours and bidding them rejoice with him. No doubt, every detail of the picture has been chosen, not simply that we might have a representation, though in poor human colours, of the delight of the Sacred Heart, but because there is something in the carrying out of the great counsel of the Redemption in individual cases which corresponds to each of these details. It is needless to say that, although we may not be able to say with certainty that this principle as to the meaning of all details should be applied to the interpretation of every one of the parables, we might still consider it probable that it should be frequently so applied, when we

remember the manner in which our Lord has Himself explained some few of the parables for us.

This once admitted, it is natural to think that our Lord had present in His Sacred Heart the whole economy of Redemption, even those parts of it which may not strictly belong to the conversion of an individual sinner. Thus some of the Fathers interpret the feature of the leaving of the ninety and nine sheep in the desert, as if it had reference to what St. Paul says of our Lord, that He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He left the heavenly companies above in order to seek out the poor race of mankind. The great end and object of the Incarnation is the finding and recovering what was lost. This is the one sufficient answer to our Lord's critics. When the shepherd is said to place the newly-found sheep on his shoulders, instead of driving it home before him, or treating it in any way as if it were worthy of punishment, we not only see in the description the tenderness of our Lord to the returning sinner, but are also reminded of the truth that our Lord took our nature upon Himself to redeem us, of the Cross which He bore up the Hill of Calvary that He might suffer for us, and of our entire dependence on Him in the matter of salvation. These things may not belong directly to the particular point which is in view in the parable as addressed to the Pharisees. But they belong to the great system of truths concerning the redemption of man, that bringing home of the lost sheep which our Lord had before His mind, and they belong to the history of the execution of the counsel of God through our Lord. So also in the calling together of his friends and kinsfolk to rejoice

with him, we have not only a picture of the immense exultation of the Sacred Heart, which is not satisfied without communicating His joy to His friends, and having a repeated and reflected delight in their joy on His account. For we are also taught concerning the tender and intimate love to us which animates all the dwellers in the world beyond the grave, between whom and ourselves there is the closest union through our Lord, and whose interest in us for His sake, as well as for our own, is a participation of His. There are none in Heaven or in Purgatory who are like “elder brothers” to the sinner, none to whom his return is not a matter of the purest and deepest joy.

“I say to you that even so there shall be joy in Heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance.” And this last sentence is repeated in the next Parable of the Woman and the Lost Groat, with the significant change, “There shall be joy before the angels of God.” It also has its counterpart in the third parable, in which the eldest son is made to take offence at the joy manifested on the return of the Prodigal, and to complain that he himself had never been made the occasion of so much rejoicing. We may presently explain rather more fully what is here meant.

II.

THE LOST GROAT.

But we must first pause a moment to speak of the second of the three parables, which appears at first sight to be a mere repetition of the first in other words. If it were only such, it might still teach us to consider how very dear the thought of the reclaiming of sinners must have been to the Sacred Heart, that He should have been at the pains to put forth the same truth twice over, and to give a second example which might represent His joy at the success of His labours in this respect. We do not repeat in this way on a subject-matter which we do not consider most important. It may be, indeed, that this is the simple explanation of the double parable. It is easy enough to find a distinct reason for the Parable of the Prodigal Son, in which the history of a declension and a conversion is related from the point of view of the sinner himself, rather than of God Who reclaims and recalls him. There are, however, several reasons for thinking that our Lord chose to repeat the truth of the Parable of the Lost Sheep in that of the Lost Groat for the sake of touching on one or two distinct points peculiar to the last of the two.

In the first place, there is a difference between the sheep which wanders and the groat which is lost. Many Christian writers insist on the fact that the coin of which our Lord speaks is stamped with the image of the King, and so may be said to represent something in that respect more precious than the sheep. These writers dwell on the truth that man

is stamped with the image of God, and that thus his soul belongs to a higher range in creation than an animal. And although we must understand man as represented by the sheep, as he belongs to God, the Creator and Provider of all, still the image of the drachma brings out the truth which the other image does not bring out, that he is the image of his Maker, and thus suggests the remark which our Lord Himself made, "How much is a man better than a sheep!" It is said, however, that the coin in question was not stamped with the image of the Emperor. In any case there is another difference between the two cases, for the sheep wanders, while the groat is lost, and in the losing of a coin there is at all events the possibility of a want of due care on the part of the owner. There can be no want of due care on the part of God. But souls get into danger in many various ways, and some of these ways may involve that kind of negligence on the part of their shepherds which is made the subject of the severe reproaches which are made in the prophecies of Ezechiel. This leads us on to another difference between these two parables, which consists in the figure of the woman. The woman or housewife has been supposed to represent the Sacred Humanity of our Lord, or the Wisdom of God, or the Church. Then the loss is in the house, and not at a distance. The candle is lighted, and the search made at home. These are the chief differences in the parables, although the numbers also differ, for the sheep that are safe are ninety-nine, and the coins that are not lost are nine.

It may have been our Lord's desire to draw a distinction between the care which God has for us in His ordinary and fatherly Providence, and the tender

love which is manifested to us in the Incarnation, and thus to show that there are two great sources of His ineffable mercifulness in our regard. And, in the same way, the work which He began as the Good Shepherd is continued after Him in the Catholic Church, the home of the faithful soul, by ministers who are responsible stewards of His mysteries and dispensers of the light of His holy Word. Their work is twofold, both to bring in the sheep from without, as our Lord said that He had other sheep who were not of that fold which He tended Himself while on earth, and who were to be brought in, and also to watch over those within the Church committed to their care, who may be as lost souls by falling into secret or interior sin without appearing openly as heretics, schismatics, or scandalous sinners. The joy of the Sacred Heart and of the angels has its place wherever sin which has been committed in any way is repented and forgiven, and this is the case whether it be that a heathen has been converted, or a heretic or schismatic brought home to security and obedience, or a man of evil life in the Church reconciled to God, or secret sins which have never been suspected by others cancelled by penance or contrition.

Some of these cases are more fitly represented by the wandering sheep, some more fitly by the lost groat. Some are brought in by missionaries, some by those who have already the charge of their souls confided to them. And it is certainly true that there are numbers of sinners whose conversion rejoices the Sacred Heart, of whom it is true that they have been lost rather than that they have wandered. For if their parents or their priests had been more diligent in good example and in watchfulness, they might

never have lost their first grace. Our Lord makes it a matter of special thanksgiving to His Father, "Of them that Thou hast given Me I have lost none," but there are few indeed among those set over the household of the Church who can be sure that it is so with themselves. Thus, therefore, we find more than one point in which this second parable supplements the first, telling us of more seekers for the lost than the single Shepherd, and reminding us of the special ordinance of mercy which has been provided in the Catholic Church, and of the work of the reclaiming of souls which goes on within her as well as outside her pale. And He ends the parable with the same Divine words which are at once His own justification, and the most scathing reproof, by implication, of His critics, who sneered at Him instead of showing Him sympathy. "So I say to you, there shall be joy in Heaven before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance," though He does not here add the other words, "more than upon ninety-nine just who do not need penance."

It is in this sentence that one chief difficulty of interpreting these parables has been found. The difficulty lies in the apparently implied statement that there is more love with God and our Lord for converted sinners than for others, their equals, or perhaps superiors, in sanctity and nearness to Him, who have never been separated from Him. This is what seems to require explanation, and the need of explanation applies to all the three parables before us. But the answer is plain when we consider the direct scope of these parables, which were occasioned by attacks on our Lord on the score of His great indulgence to sinners. The conduct which was

criticized by the Scribes and Pharisees was the result and the manifestation of the joy of the Sacred Heart. Joy is a different feeling from love and esteem, as sorrow is a different feeling from dislike or contempt. Joy is the natural outburst of relief and satisfaction at the recovery of what has been lost, or the return of what has wandered from us, at reconciliation after a quarrel, or deliverance after a danger, reunion after a separation, victory after a conflict. In this sense our Lord must be understood. The rejoicing of which He speaks on account of the return of sinners is as different in its way from His quiet tranquil love for those who have not gone astray, as was the sorrow which the loss of the sinners originally occasioned. A great blow had been inflicted on His Heart by the loss of the wanderers, who had been originally most dear to Him. That blow was now redeemed and recompenced by the joy of their recovery, and this gave occasion for an outburst of thankfulness and exultation which in its way was greater than the exultation over those in whose case the sorrow of their loss had not been felt. A soul recovered from sin was a victory of grace, after grace had been defeated and exiled. The King had come back in triumph, and the injury which His realm had suffered was now repaired.

In both the two first parables our Lord puts the same words into the mouth of the person representing Himself, "Rejoice with me, for I have found what was lost." It was His own work in souls which He had in His mind, dearer to Him than could be understood by the hearts of men or angels, the accomplishment of the special mission committed to Him

by His Father, on which mission He was to spend the whole of His Life Blood, for which He was to give Himself and all that He had. The measure of the joy was that of the love of His Heart for His Father, and of His gratitude for His Father's tenderness concerning us, of the cost which He was about to pay for the accomplishment of His work, and of the knowledge which He had of the infinite misery from which redeemed souls were to be rescued. In this there are several elements of rejoicing which are not to be found in the case of those of whom He speaks as needing no penance. Of such indeed He can say, in the words which He puts into the mouth of the good father of the Prodigal, at the end of the third parable, that they are always with Him, and all that He has is theirs. The truth which these words represent gives those to whom they apply an incomunicable value, in His eyes and His Heart, in which the others do not share.

And thus, if we are to follow out the thought of the Fathers, mentioned above, the words may certainly be applied to the love of God for the holy angels, who have never been lost, and so never been found again, as men have been lost and found. The joy of God over them is different, not so much in degree as in kind, from that which is here spoken of. It has never been shaken, never dashed by sorrow, and so it does not break out in the feeling of victory, recovery, restoration, and the like. But although the love of God and our Redeemer for His redeemed, is not the same as that for those who have not been redeemed, it need not be argued that it is either greater or less. And so, in the case of men, as the truth that some have once wandered and others have

not, does not of necessity imply a greater merit on the part of the soul, either of the sinner recovered, or the saint who did not need recovery, so it does not imply greater love for such on the part of our Lord. And, indeed, when we come to think of the truth as it is with us, in a most true sense, there are no ninety-nine sheep who have not been recovered, there are no nine groats which have not been lost. The spotless Mother of God herself, in all the plenitude of her ineffable sanctity, is one of the redeemed, although she had never wandered. The same Sacrifice which brought back others was applied to prevent her from ever needing to be sought for. She has the largest share of all in the fruits of the Redemption, though she has had the ineffable blessing of being preserved from even the slightest stain of sin.

In the two first of these parables it may be noticed that what is recovered by the owners of the sheep or of the groat has not been lost by any fault of its own. It is simply a thing lost, and missed, and regretted, and sought, and found, and rejoiced over. This may be taken as reminding us that though we are like the Prodigal Son, in that our wanderings are the result of our own perversity, still the love of God pursues us and strains itself for our recovery because we belong to Him, not because we deserve anything at His hands by our own merits. This part of the story of recovery is left out in the third parable as having been sufficiently set forth in the former two, which differ also in other respects from the last. This third is more full, more tender, more touching, setting before the Christian mind a larger view of God's merciful Providence as well as many particulars of the action of that Providence on the revolt

of the sinner which could not be so well expressed under the images of the lost sheep and the lost groat. In those parables the chief point was the intense desire of God for the recovery of the lost, the pains He takes, especially in the Incarnation and Redemption of man, to accomplish that recovery, and, in particular, the deep and immense joy when it is accomplished, which adds a new element of exultation and triumph which can only be found in cases where a loss has first been sustained.

III.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

Thus, in the sketch of God's mercies to us, the story of the Prodigal Son fills up many details. Such at the very outset is the happy life of the children of God with Him before there is any falling away into sin. The lost one is here, not a sheep, or a groat, but man with a soul endowed with liberty, and thus capable of giving the highest honour to God by the exercise of that unparalleled gift. He is not merely a man, stamped with the Divine image, a thought which might have been suggested by the groat in the second parable. He is a son, and therefore with the right of inheritance of the Kingdom of his Father. These features of the character of God in His dealings with His free creatures are illustrated in this parable and not in the others. And in the second place, the return is brought about by the conversion of the lost one himself. It is not a groat found, or a sheep brought home, but a man whose heart is changed by God's grace. This is minutely described, and in this respect also the parable differs from those

which precede it. The action of God is not limited to His seeking and working for the return of that which is lost. That part has been already set forth, and if a man is anxious to recover a sheep, or a house-wife anxious to recover a piece of money, much more, are we led to infer, must God our Father yearn after His lost children. What is here traced is the history of the soul itself, first in its wandering and degradation, and then in its awakening and conversion, the mightiest work of grace, in the soul itself, and not outside it.

"And He said, A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of substance that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his substance. And not many days after, the younger son, gathering all together, went abroad into a far country, and there wasted his substance, living riotously. And after he had spent all, there came a mighty famine in that country, and he began to be in want. And he went and cleaved to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his farm to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him. And returning to himself, he said, How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger! I will arise and will go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants. And rising up he went to his father. And when he was yet a great way off his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and running to him, fell upon his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee,

I am not now worthy to be called thy son. And the father said to his servants, Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and make merry, because this my son was dead and is come to life again, was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field, and when he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, Thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe. And he was angry, and would not go in. His father, therefore, coming out began to entreat him. And he answering said to his father, Behold, for so many years do I serve thee, and I have never transgressed thy commandment, and yet thou hast never given me a kid to make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son is come, who hath devoured his substance with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. But he said to him, Son, thou art always with me, and all that I have is thine. But it was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead and is come to life again, he was lost, and is found."

If we take the successive stages of the history here set before us, we have first to speak of the state of things in the house of the father, with his sons living with him in happy freedom and intercourse, before as yet the evil thought of liberty had entered the mind of the younger. This is contained in the words of the answer to the elder brother, "Son, thou art always with me, and all that I have is thine." We are the children of God, and we live in daily and hourly intercourse with Him, which is

more than enough to satisfy our hearts, which is, indeed, the only condition, being what we are, in which our hearts can find any satisfaction. There is here, perhaps, a silent rebuke to the angry complaint of the elder son, that he had never had a kid given him that he might make merry with his friends. He had far more, for he was always with his father. In the state of the soul of which we speak, God is enough for it. God is its all in all, it has no other cravings but such as are within His law, and are satisfied by the peaceful enjoyments of the life of virtue and obedience. Children in the home of their father, even on earth, have no need of anything. All their wants are anticipated and supplied beforehand, as, in the holy homes of the religious life, men continue year after year without any purse or resource of their own, and yet with no need of anything. And on the other hand, those who enjoy this condition of the children of God are rich beyond all measure and calculation. For all that He has is theirs. All His treasures are already theirs, or at their disposal. Earth and Heaven and all that is in them belong to them, in a way in which no one else can possess them. All things minister to them in revealing Him to them, in instructing them concerning Him, in supporting their life, in training them in virtue, as means of enjoyment or of the victories which are opened to them either by temptation or affliction, or suffering of any kind. Heaven is theirs also, because all the angels and saints are their friends, and they have the inexhaustible treasures of grace in the sacraments, the Word of God, the ministry, and the other means in which the fruits of the Precious Blood are stored up. He

Himself is theirs, and their prayers and wishes and needs are open to Him before they know them themselves, and they can ask nothing in faith which He will refuse them. The essence of their blessedness lies in their being His children and being always with Him, and in this is included the second clause of the answer, "All that I have is thine." Being with Him ensures them untold treasures of every kind of good which they can enjoy.

The next stage in the history is the perversion of the Prodigal Son. Our Lord seems to intend us to see that all sin begins in the love of liberty, of having our own independence, of being our own masters. It is not said that the Prodigal became better off in the sense of being more able to supply his own needs, that his life became more peaceful, more enjoyable, after his emancipation. It is not said that he had lacked for anything, or had any lawful desire checked. But we gather from the words of the elder son that his state was one of obedience. "I never transgressed thy commandments," he says to his father. The Prodigal desired to be his own master, to manage his own affairs, to have his own way, to use his own means as he chose. It is clear that the love of independence is something different from the passion of avarice, or lust, or gluttony, and the rest, and that it is the first thing in rebellion against God, in whatever way, or by yielding to whatever evil temptation, we may break His law. And so, on the other hand, the principle of obedience, submission, dependence, is the natural condition of all true humility and of all true consciousness of our due relations to God. After the love of independence, our Lord places

alienation from God, for it is His yoke under which we have found ourselves, it is from Him that we wish to emancipate ourselves, and that being the case, we would gladly be free of Him, get out of His sight, and if possible put Him out of our minds and thoughts. Thus the departure of the Prodigal follows upon his emancipation. "And not many days after, the younger son, gathering all together, went abroad into a far country, and there wasted his substance, living riotously." Our Lord speaks gently in these last words, as we find the elder son speaking plainly and roughly, when he says that his brother "devoured his substance with harlots."

Before proceeding further in tracing the course of the Prodigal, we must not forget to pause a moment over the conduct of the father in the parable, in which is depicted by our Lord the method of God in dealing with rebellious children. It will be observed that our Lord does not mention that the father made any resistance to the proposal that the son should be put in possession of the portion which fell to his share, nor does He say that the father made any effort to retain the Prodigal at home after the division had been made. The demand is made as if it were a matter of right. It did not imply due respect or affection on the part of the son to make the demand, and the father might have refused to comply with it, and by such refusal might have saved the foolish youth from working out his own ruin. Nor, as a matter of fact, can it be said that God allows the declining sinner the full use of his liberty, without putting many difficulties in the downward path, and warning him,

in many ways, externally and internally, against the moral suicide which he is committing.

Yet it is a certain and most important feature in the methods of God, that He respects the liberty of His creatures, even when He knows that it will be used against Himself, and to their own great loss and harm. He has made them free, that they may have a share in winning their own rewards, and that He may have from them that special glory of a free service which cannot be paid to Him by the other creatures, who do His will so perfectly and so beautifully without the exercise of their own. And thus, when He sees that men will use the liberty which is their most noble endowment in a wrong way, He chooses to bring good out of their evil rather than to hinder their evil by the exercise of His own Almighty power. The most marvellous instance of this method of God is in the permission of the sin of the angels. For the angels were, on the one hand, the highest order of spiritual existences created by Him, they were endowed with the noblest gifts of intelligence and capacity. And, on the other hand, their fall was to be irreparable, without the opportunity of revocation by repentance or of remedy by redemption and atonement. It was well that in the creation of God there should be this instance of absolute justice in dealing with the rebellion of free spiritual beings, justice which was not tempered by mercy in any opening of the door of restoration, although it was tempered by mercy in the infliction of a punishment less than was deserved by the sin. He allowed them to use their freedom, and then turned away from them His face for ever. He has not dealt in this way with fallen

man, for He has provided for him the redemption which is offered through our dear Lord. But He acts on the same principle in permitting sin, "reverencing," as the Scripture speaks, the free will which He has given, just as He may be said to "reverence" the nature which He has created by never destroying it if He has made it immortal.

Thus the father of the Prodigal may be said to represent to us God the Father of all, and especially of those whom He has made free, faithfully allowing to them the exercise of their liberty, without doing it violence, even although He sees that in particular cases that exercise will result in His own dishonour and in their rebellion against Himself. He does not abandon sinners, but He ordinarily lets them have their own way if they insist upon it, and His Providence waits upon them as they run on in their reckless course, ever ready to seize on the opportunity which they may give Him of bringing them to their senses by the experience which they gather of the emptiness and fickleness of the world, of the slavery of sin, of the need of the Creator of which man cannot divest himself. Sometimes He chastises at once, but ordinarily He forbears. He allows men to choose paths in life which He did not mean for them, to stifle their consciences as to matters which involve the whole of their future, and He lets the false step which they have taken lead to its own natural consequences, and then He shows them what they have done. On those who are not to be converted He allows temporal prosperity and success to wait for a time, giving them at least in this world "the portion of substance that falleth to them," because He sees that they may force Him to

deny them the eternal goods. The good health, worldly success, popularity, and applause which seem to haunt them continually, are often, in the eyes of the servants of God, the most terrible of His chastisements, because they show that He deems them unworthy of the discipline of suffering by which so many others are reclaimed.

Another method of His Providence is illustrated in this history of the Prodigal Son. Our Lord describes him as brought to conversion mainly by the pressure of external misfortune and misery, aided, of course, by the interior graces which accompany the visitations of God. "And after he had spent all, there came a mighty famine in that country, and he began to be in want. And he went and cleaved to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his farm to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat. And no man gave unto him." The Prodigal was allowed to take his fill of worldly and sensual enjoyments, and then he was led to see and feel their utter incapacity to give true and lasting satisfaction. Thus there is always a great famine in the land of the world without God, for the needs and aspirations of the human mind and heart cannot find what they want without Him. Many are allowed to persuade themselves that they have no nobler instincts or capacity for higher things than what the world can give. They become like the animals. But in the case of the Prodigal, it seems to be meant that he woke up to the perception of his true condition by the falling away on every side of him of all the false goods on which he had been inclined to rely for enjoyment and satisfaction.

The hunger of the soul for its natural end in God is most of all terrible in the case of the lost in the next world, who must crave and pine for ever, with no false goods to cheat them, and know also that they can never have any more than they possess already of the good for which they faint. But the same hunger, in a less degree, is the torment of many souls among the children of the world and of pleasure, who are so restless in their pursuit of one false good after another, and are still over and over again disappointed in what they fondly hope may satisfy, or at least overwhelm, the disquiet of their minds and consciences and furnish some food for the craving of their hearts. It is God's mercy, when they discover their illusion, and are not left in the drunken sleep of the utterly brutalized worldlings.

Our Lord's picture of the sinner who has abandoned God consists, in the main, of four features. There is the famine of the soul of which we have been speaking. Then there is added the element of servitude—for the Prodigal “went and cleaved to one of the citizens of that country.” Then there is degradation, for “he sent him into his farm to feed swine.” And lastly there is the feature of utter destitution and friendlessness, for “he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him.” These four elements are to be found in the case of every sinner. For the abundance of the house of our Father we have in exchange the famine which reigns in the world without God. For the gentle rule of God and His Law we have the slavery to which sin binds us down. The “citizen of the country” is Satan,

who is at home in the lost and rebellious world, and who is indeed a hard master. The world tyrannizes over those who come to it from the service of God. The world is an usurper, an impostor, who rules not by right but by force, who claims to give what he cannot furnish, and promises what he cannot perform, always suspicious because his throne is not a lawful throne, and because he knows his own imposture, and fears that it may be detected by others at any moment. Its pleasures can never truly supply the goods which even the lower appetites demand of them. They are never satisfied, their demands grow as they take root in the soul, and as one false satisfaction after another is tried in vain. The world and Satan have no true goods to give, no wholesome employments on which to occupy their slaves. All that they can command, with ever-increasing imperiousness, is degradation, ever lower and lower, the reckless bestial indulgence of the lowest passions, grosser and grosser as the appetite loses all remains of refinement and decency. Husks of swine indeed! and fit only for the bellies of swine. And then the last feature is the hard, cruel, pitiless insensibility to the misery to which the soul is reduced. There can be no true friendship where selfishness is the law of all. Worldlings are leagued together by interest or avarice or ambition, but their alliance has no solidity and no heart. All are the prey of a deep internal misery and hopelessness, which dries up even natural affection and the social kindness which is so poor a substitute for charity. In Hell all are consumed by mutual hatred, and the hardness of the heart of sinners one to another is a kind of anticipation of Hell.

As has been said, our Lord does not trace out for us any action of the father for the recovery of his son. In the true history which He has in His mind, that of the return of the sinner to God, we know how great is the importance of the workings of grace, without which the external measures of Providence in afflicting, chastising, awakening the sinner would be of no avail. It might be expected, therefore, that He should tell us of messages of love and remonstrance sent by the father to the wanderer, and of other attempts to bring him to a better mind. But this part of the history of the return of the sinner is here left untouched, apparently because it has been sufficiently hinted at, at least, in the two preceding parables, which belong to the same subject. The man who has one sheep out of a hundred, leaves the ninety-nine and goes to search after that which was lost, and the woman who has lost her groat does not rest till she has found it. In the same way God does not cease pleading with the soul which has abandoned Him, and what He does in this way is, in truth, the foundation and cause of the conversion which follows, whenever it does follow. But what parable could describe the tenderness, the perseverance, the inventiveness, the delicacy, and the efficacy of the graces by which God woos back the soul? In this part of the parable our Lord is sketching what passes in the mind and heart of the Prodigal himself. We must fill up the picture in our meditations by borrowing from the other parables that which is here left out. The change of heart which answers to the external circumstances of which we have had to speak, is the beautiful fruit of Divine grace. It is that which

makes profitable the external discipline by means of which the Prodigal is awakened, which drives him in upon himself, and lights up in his mind the thoughts and reflections which are the foundations of his resolution to return. "And returning to himself he said, How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger! I will arise, and will go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants."

Here the foundation of the conversion is the thought of the goodness of the father. Even the menials in his home are abundantly supplied with food. He had left it out of a love of independence, and his use of the freedom which had been granted him had brought him into a worse case than that of those who lived with his father as servants, not as sons. Those hired servants were now objects of envy to him, who had not been content to depend as a child upon his father, who was their master, supporting and maintaining them, not out of love, but out of justice, in reward for their services. He had forfeited his father's loving care, but he might at least offer him the service of a mercenary. This is put before us as the first thought of the Prodigal, but it is but the occasion of other reflections and dispositions which go beyond it. In the words which our Lord puts into his mouth we can trace his love for his father, his grief at having left him and disgraced him, his humility and disregard of human respect in proposing to go and confess his fault, his desire to atone for the past by a life of penitential servitude among people who had known him in his

former state of liberty and honour, and his consciousness that above all he had offended God far more than men, that consciousness which made holy David cry out after his greatest sin, *Tibi soli peccavi et malum coram te feci.* He does not speak of his misery, but of his sin. These are the affections and dispositions of the true penitent, of Magdalene as of David, contemplating an entire change of life, and hoping bravely to be enabled to serve God diligently and profitably in a course of reparation. Thus the few words of the Prodigal may be used by us as pointing out the affections which we should endeavour to make dominant in our souls if we desire to turn to God and lead a life of true and generous penitence.

“And rising up, he came to his father. And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and running to him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him. And his son said to him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son. And the father said to his servants, Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and make merry, because this my son was dead and is come to life again, was lost and is found. And they began to make merry.” All through this parable our Lord has before Him the joy of God at the return of the sinner, and He now describes more particularly the manner in which that joy shows itself, as well as the special ground on which it is founded, namely, that a conversion from sin is a recovery of what had been lost, a

coming to life of what had been dead, and is therefore a greater victory of grace than even the perseverance of the just in their virtue. The source of all this special joy lies in the tender loving heart of the father in the parable, which cannot reflect except most faintly the infinite love of God, our Creator and Father. The depths of that love can never be fathomed, until we can understand the ineffable joy and love which are the life of God, and comprehend what it is in Him to have created us after His own image and likeness, and designed us for the possession of His own blessedness throughout all eternity.

The particulars are specified in which the manifestation of this love is set forth, the first or best robe, the ring on the finger, the shoes to the feet, to do away with the last vestige of poverty and misery in his appearance. They express the thoughtful charity with which, in the reception of the sinner by God, every honour is lavished on him and every blemish is removed from him. The picture teaches us that there is no stinting, no reserve, no half measures, in the pardon which God delights to impart to us, as if it were a greater triumph and a greater joy to Him than it is a benefit to ourselves. The "first robe" is understood by many Fathers as the baptismal innocence which is restored to perfect penitence, the ring on the finger as the mark that the penitent is once again the acknowledged child of God, the shoes on the feet are taken to mark his freedom to walk on in the path of virtue. In the picture drawn in the parable, these are just what would have been given in the East to one who was to take his place in the household as son of the lord. It is remarkable that our Lord does not make the

Prodigal repeat the request which he had intended to make, that he might henceforth be as one of the hired servants of his father. For the welcome which he had received, the embrace and kiss of his father, had anticipated any words of his, and after such demonstrations of love he may have felt it more meet to leave his future condition in his father's hands. But the words of the father seem designed to answer the request which he had intended to make. For the treatment which he is to receive is one which places him at once back again where he was before, or even raises him higher than he had ever been in his father's house. The first robe, the ring on the finger, the banquet and rejoicing, are not in keeping with the position of a hired servant. He is a son, who can never forfeit his relationship. He has been dead, and is alive again. He has been lost, and is found.

Thus, then, the picture sets before us the truth that the children of God, when they return to Him, are still to be treated as the darlings of His heart. It also represents the truth which is often noticed in the case of the penitent, that it pleases God in His tenderness to overwhelm them with delights and spiritual favours, filling them with unutterable joy and consolation, such as perhaps they will know only occasionally in their after-lives, however faithful they may be to the grace of God. For He sees fit to give them these first tastes of heavenly joys, for the sake of increasing their love and confidence, and preparing them to be courageous and patient when it pleases Him to treat them in a different manner with regard to consolation and spiritual delights. These things are the sweets with which He feeds

His children when they are as yet beginners in His service, and He constantly grants them in large abundance to those who have to begin again after having been wanderers.

In the last part of the parable we have an instance of our Lord's method in this kind of teaching. For He has often added a new strain of teaching at the end of such instructions, taking the imagery of the parable already given, and subjoining a fresh instruction which seems to grow out of the former. This we shall find in His teaching about the Rich Glutton and Lazarus, where He has added a new point of doctrine in the answer of Abraham to the petition of the rich man that Lazarus may be sent to his own brethren. Thus we find when He seems to repeat the Parable of the Great Supper, that He adds the teaching about the wedding garment. In the present case, the addition deals with the case of the persons who gave immediate occasion for its delivery, and whom our Lord is therefore answering all through. "Now his elder brother was in the field, and when he came and drew nigh to the house he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, Thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe. And he was angry, and would not go in. His father therefore coming out began to entreat him. And he answering said to his father, Behold, for so many years do I serve thee, and I have never transgressed thy commandment, and yet thou hast never given me a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son is come, who hath

devoured his substance with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. But he said to him, Son, thou art always with me, and all that I have is thine. But it was fit that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead and is come to life again, he was lost and is found."

These words of our Lord put the case of the Scribes and Pharisees very gently and kindly. For He might certainly have exposed in them many faults, which might have made them ashamed of their objections to His treatment of the publicans and sinners. He might have shown them that their place was by the side rather of the Prodigal than of his brother, that it was only their own blindness which made them self-satisfied and hard upon others whom they thought worse than themselves. He might have uncovered their many hypocrisies, and spoken openly of their interior corruption. He might, as He had done before, have shown them how the spirit of mercy was better than sacrifice, how condescending and tender was God in His dealings with men, as they are described in the Sacred Scriptures. But instead of this, He takes them, as we may say, at their own price, and allows them the virtues which they claimed for themselves. The elder brother describes himself as having always been faithful in the service of his father, and the father does not deny his faithfulness. He goes out to remonstrate with him, instead of leaving him alone or rebuking him for his unnatural hardness of heart. The father speaks to him most lovingly, even after he has listened to his undutiful reproaches, which charge the father with partiality to the Prodigal and with coldness to himself. He tells him,

"Thou art always with me, and all that I have is thine," instead of reminding him of his entire dependence, and that whatever he himself had given he might also take away. He does not notice the rude and coarse manner in which he speaks of his brother. He seems to apologize for his own excessive tenderness, while at the same time he defends it as reasonable and fitting in its manifestation, and these are the only words which can be understood as a rebuke. For when he says, "It was fit that we should make merry and be glad," he implies that the elder brother should have been the first to join in the merriment and gladness, as no one in the household, except the father himself, could be so closely bound to affection to the Prodigal and to gratitude for his recovery from misery.

These traits belong to the character of God as it is here drawn for us by our Lord, and, while they show His boundless tenderness and compassion, they shed a soft light on the character of those represented by the elder son, which brings out in strong relief all that is unamiable therein, and its immense contrast to the father's love. The elder son may have served his father without breaking his commandment, but he was as unlike his father in his charity, as the Prodigal had been unlike him in his purity. His whole demeanour is churlish and harsh. Men are revealed by sudden surprises. When they are caught unawares, their character comes out. This man's first acquaintance with the fact that something new had happened was caused by the sound of music and dancing, which fell on his ear as he drew nigh his home. There was nothing in his heart to answer it, nothing to make

him rejoice at the merriment he heard. He will not even see for himself what it is that has made his father so glad, and he takes his cue, so to say, from the ungenial servant who had no reason, as he had, to rejoice whenever the good father of the household made merry. And so, when he learns the truth which ought to have filled his heart with joy and gratitude, and made him rush in to embrace his brother and join in his father's joy, he hangs back as if he had met with some great injury or disappointment. He could not have kept the Prodigal in his heart, nor prayed for his return. To him his brother was indeed dead and lost, and he did not even think of him with that tender regret which men keep in their hearts for those who are dead and gone, whose frailties they forget, whose errors they forgive, dwelling on their memories with affection, however far they may have wandered ere they died. This is the secret of the conduct of such men as are here sketched by our Lord. They may be correct in their outward lives, but they have no tenderness of heart, no breadth of affection, no deep sympathies for the fallen, no true yearning for their recovery. So when that recovery comes, and they themselves are the persons who ought most naturally to rejoice at it, they are more ready to take scandal at the indulgence which welcomes them back than to break out in joy and thanksgiving at their return.

In their comments on these and other similar passages in the Gospels, we find the Fathers frequently understanding them as prophecies and anticipations of that most signal act of God's love and mercy whereby the Gentile world was admitted into the Church, much to the offence of the Jews, whom

they consider to be depicted in the elder brother. That they should so have understood these words of our Lord is very natural, and the fact shows us how deep and lasting in the mind and heart of the Church was the gratitude for that wonderful feature in her history. We, on the other hand, are inclined to take the mercy of God on the Gentile world as a matter of course, although we are the people who inherit the blessings thus imparted to those who, at the time of our Lord, were aliens from the covenant and outside the pale of the chosen people. These comments of the Fathers are a perpetual chorus of thanksgiving for the mercies of God on the Gentile world, and we who inherit those mercies do well to keep them continually in our mind, as if they had only just been extended to us, and to make them a matter of perpetual thanksgiving, which is a means with which few can compare of securing the continuance and increase of the favour of God.

It is certainly, moreover, very highly probable that our Lord had this application of His words in His own mind when the parables in question were spoken. It was not the counsel of God that He should Himself admit the Gentiles into the Church, but He was always looking forward to what was to be in her history. Nor could any portion of that history be more important in itself, more imminent in the rapidity with which it was to succeed after His Ascension into Heaven, than this. It was to be the first great onward step of the Church towards her universal Empire, the first great stroke of Providence, opening out new paths for the feet of the Apostles, breaking down the narrow limits within which the Kingdom of Heaven had seemed to be

confined. It was a stroke of Providence which it would strain the minds even of Apostles to understand, and which fell as a shock on a great portion of the Jewish community which had embraced the faith, while the Jews outside the Church received it with indignation and hatred. To say this is to say that there was in these classes of men more or less of the feelings and dispositions which are attributed in the parable to the elder brother. This is, indeed, not the only passage in the later portions of the Gospel narrative which seems to have reference to that impending change in the arrangements of God's Kingdom on earth which was to be the salvation of the Gentile world, while it was to arouse a certain amount of hostility and censure on the part of some of the Jewish nation. If we consider that our Lord had the first years of the life of His Church in view at this time, as it must be certain that He had, it becomes very easy to understand the commentaries of the Fathers on this and other similar passages of His history, as well as the readiness which the early Gentile Fathers show in recognizing the immense mercy of God to the world which had issued in the creation of the Gentile Church. It was the first great triumph of the grace which came into the world by the Sacrifice of the Good Shepherd, the first great occasion at which His Heart must have rejoiced with joy unspeakable.

But, alas! the dispositions of the elder brother are founded in our poor human nature, and must not be limited to any one particular instance to which our Lord may be supposed to have referred. Good people are often very narrow-minded, and the possession of spiritual privileges may often become

the foundation of self-satisfaction and of an exclusive feeling with regard to others. To say this is the same thing as to say that it requires a special grace of humility and thankfulness to feel as to such points as God would have us feel, and that our largest and widest thoughts concerning His compassion and mercifulness are sure enough to be inadequate. Our minds can only take in with immense difficulty the boundless amplitude of the goodness of God. It is supremely difficult to be grateful enough for His mercies to ourselves, and so it is also supremely difficult to understand how merciful He can be to others, how constantly He passes over the limits of His covenant, how free He is in giving what He has not promised. As we see in the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, our Lord was continually labouring to make this feature in God's dealings with men intelligible. The Christian doctrine concerning the conditions on which the means of grace are offered to mankind, furnishes the only limit that can be put to the clemency of God, and this doctrine, when rightly understood, opens the door of mercy very wide indeed in all cases in which men do what they can, in ignorance of his positive institutions, and in good faith as to what He requires of them. If Christians are ever too severe, too strict, too exclusive, making God require what is impossible, and the like, it is not because of the rigidity of the Christian doctrine, but on account of the narrowness, the exclusiveness, the jealousy, the self-satisfaction of those who misunderstand it. The way to understand God's love is to love Him with all our might, and to love with all our might every creature under heaven for whom

our Lord had shed His Blood and stored up His graces in the Church.

“Elder-brotherism,” then, if we can coin such a word, is a spirit which may often put us altogether out of harmony with the sweetness and largeness of the love of God. The first instances of it, no doubt, in the history of the Church, are to be found in the demeanour of some of the Judaizing Christians to the converts from the Gentiles, for whom St. Paul had to labour to secure the full recognition of the doctrine laid down by St. Peter, “We believe to be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, in like manner as they also.”¹ But it is too natural a growth of human narrowness not to have survived the controversies about the Gentiles in the earliest age. It was a kindred spirit to that which made the Christians say, “I am of Paul, and I am of Apollo, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ.” The children of the earliest converts from the heathen may in their turn have been inclined to look with some disdain on the converts of their own day. The members of nations which have long been Catholic may be tempted to look down on the newly reclaimed Protestant or schismatic. We shall soon come to the parable in which those who have borne the burthen of the day and the heat are made to complain that those who have worked but one hour are made equal to themselves. We shall then see how mischievous such a spirit is, which our Lord seems to point to as almost the one greatest danger to His servants, inasmuch as He speaks of it as the cause why the first are made last and the last first, in His Kingdom. Certainly, we find it

¹ Acts xv. 11.

here, in these Pharisees and Scribes, so many of whom were to lose all place therein. For Satan is ever on the watch to work in spiritual persons on those elements in their character which may be made to give birth to faults against charity, knowing that the ruin of the soul is certain to follow when such faults are allowed to root themselves therein. And it belongs to the doctrine of the loving mercy of God that those who are in danger of such faults should be gently and tenderly warned of their enormous danger.

It is not wonderful, therefore, if our Lord had in His mind as a very prominent object in the delivery of this great parable, the spiritual misery of those who are represented under the image of the elder brother. Nor is it wonderful if he framed His words so as to touch very pointedly the case of these Scribes and Pharisees, many of whom were so soon to lose their opportunity of closing with the Gospel offers out of a kind of jealous indignation at the freedom with which these same offers were made to and accepted by the Gentiles. The elder brother in the parable must have changed his conduct altogether if he was to live on in happiness in his father's house. If he would not go in to the banquet of rejoicing, it might soon come to his refusing to live with the returned Prodigal altogether. Thus our Lord seems to give us another lesson beyond that of the misery of leaving God and of the love with which we shall be welcomed back if we return after having left Him. He seems to tell us that if it is miserable to wander or to have wandered, there may be even greater misery in store for those who have kept themselves right

when others went wrong, if they are not full of charity for them when they return. This is the doctrine of St. Paul, when he tells us that to speak with the tongues of men and angels, or to have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, or to have the faith that can move mountains, or to distribute all our goods to feed the poor, or to give our bodies to be burned, all these things will profit us nothing if we have not charity. A lesson important indeed to all who have been born to the possession of the Gospel privileges, and who have been sheltered all their lives from the danger of forfeiting them. And a lesson to those, also, who have come back like the Prodigal, lest it should ever occur to them, after their return, to look down on others, or forget, as the elder brother forgot, to pray for them and so prepare their own hearts to welcome them home.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD.

St. Luke xvi. 1—13; *Story of the Gospels*, § 115.

ST. LUKE proceeds from the parables of which we have last been speaking to another head of doctrine, concerning the use of riches. In this case, as in the former, he joins together more than one teaching of our Lord, as to which we are not certain whether they were, or were not, delivered quite consecutively. The connection between them as to subject-matter is obvious at once. There are a few words at the beginning of the second of these instructions which tell us that the Pharisees had heard the former, and that they met it with derision and contumely. In consequence of this, our Lord went on to the second instruction, which contains the story, or parable, of Lazarus and the Rich Glutton. It will already have been noted, that in the parables of this period our Lord seems to have had the Pharisees very much in His mind, and it may perhaps be the case that He saw in their souls the immense evil of covetousness in spiritual and ecclesiastical persons. It was a secret root of mischief in their souls, affecting their whole character, and operating most powerfully in preventing them from becoming His disciples, and helping to the conversion of others. This tacit

reference to the Pharisees may help us to the more thorough intelligence of the parable, or history, now to be considered.

“And He said also to His disciples, There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him and said to him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship, for now thou canst be steward no longer. And the steward said within himself, What shall I do, because my lord taketh away from me the stewardship? To dig I am unable, to beg I am ashamed. I know what I will do, that when I shall be removed from my stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. Therefore calling together every one of his lord’s debtors, he said to the first, How much dost thou owe my lord? But he said, A hundred barrels of oil. And he said to him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then he said to another, And how much dost thou owe? Who said, A hundred quarters of wheat. He said to him, Take thy bill, and write eighty. And the lord commended the unjust steward, forasmuch as he had done wisely, for the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.”

This is a history of which it seems probable that the individual details are not to be so pressed as if each had some spiritual meaning. Indeed, as it is not said to be a parable by the Evangelist, there is no need whatever for assuming it to be such, and it is only as such that we should be justified in supposing that all its details are full of meaning hidden under the facts. The attempt to interpret it in such a manner has been the cause of endless perplexity to those who have made it. The example

is that of a man of the world, unscrupulous as to the use of the means which happened to be in his hands, who made of them, without regard to justice, the use most advantageous for his own interests in a moment of pressure. Our Lord seems to tell us that this is His meaning by the last clause, in which He speaks of the children of this world being wiser in their generation than the children of light. The steward made a clever use of his opportunity, and thus secured, or seemed to secure, the object which he had in view, although it was gained at the expense of his master, who was about to discard him. The lord who commends the unjust steward is the master who admires the clever trick by which the friendship of his debtors had been gained. He went over, so to speak, to the side of his master's debtors, and made them his friends, at the cost of losing his master's friendship, which he had no hope of retaining. It was the only way open to a man in difficulties, and he had the wit to avail himself of it. He had thus done wisely. He had shown that he understood the ways of the world, and was wise enough to grasp the occasion which presented itself before it was too late. It seems as if the lord could have had no redress, under the circumstances, from the debtors, who could produce the steward's acquittance of their debts, while the steward himself had no substance which could be seized to make it worth while to proceed against him. Our Lord would have us to be on the look out to make the most of our opportunities and money, and whatever comes to our hand, to use them for the true interests of our soul. And He tells us that, ordinarily speaking, worldlings are more skilful, more vigilant,

more energetic, more discerning, as to the interests which they have at heart, than we are as to those eternal goods which we have so many opportunities of gaining which we let slip. He sets before us a man who used his opportunities to make himself friends, and it is this point on which He insists in the injunction with which the parable closes. In this way the history is at least easy to understand, and the lesson which it conveys is very practical.

“And I say to you, Make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity, that when you shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting dwellings.” The friends whom the steward secured by his cleverness might have remained his friends for a time only, and their means of sheltering him in his destitution must have failed in time. But those whom we can make our friends by the right use of the mammon of iniquity will be our friends for ever. And the homes into which they may receive us are the everlasting mansions of the Kingdom of Heaven. This, then, our Lord seems to tell us, is the reason for which the good things of this world, wealth and the like, are placed in our hands. Of themselves they cannot secure us any good, they cannot preserve or restore our health, they are not in themselves the cause of any pleasure or solace, they cannot soothe the wounds of our heart, or answer the questionings of our mind, or be our companions in solitude and bereavement, any more than they can satisfy our hunger or thirst, or relieve our pain. They can procure us some of these things from our fellow-men, and it is on this account that we value them and use them. But they are not useful in this way in this world alone,

and for the ends of this world. They can make us friends in this world, as the steward's example shows us. But far more they can make us friends in the next. We cannot carry them with us, but we can send their fruit before us, which can furnish us in our everlasting home with friends whose aid can never fail, who will meet us on the eternal shores with welcome and love when otherwise we might land thereon in utter destitution and abject misery.

If we ask ourselves who these friends may be whose loving aid we may secure to ourselves by the wise use of the dross of this world's wealth, we may find more than one answer. For the wealth of the world, the mammon of iniquity, as our Lord calls it, may be used even directly for the service of God in the building of churches or altars, the decorations of the sanctuary, the furniture of holy vessels for Sacrifice, and the like. Nothing can be a higher use of gold and silver and precious stones than their application in the service and worship of God. Christian men have thus used the mammon of the world since the beginning of the Church, and their sacrifices, however worthy and rare in themselves, have always been understood as included in the blessing which fell from our Lord's lips when Magdalene broke her box of most precious ointment over His Head at the Supper at Bethany. The same devotion has covered the land with houses in which the servants of God may dwell to offer to Him, in sacred retirement, the unceasing homage of the practice of religious rules, and the songs and praises which echo back from the lower world the endless worship of the heavenly hosts. It has shed itself out in other ways, less directly, but not less

truly, concerned with the homage due to Him, as in hospitals, and institutions of beneficence, schools, asylums, orphanages, retreats for the aged and infirm and destitute, even the most afflicted, and to outward sense, the most uninviting, lepers, lunatics, maniacs, the imbecile, the subjects of the most loathsome and the most contagious diseases.

In these ways we make God Himself our friend, because they are all directed to Him, mediately or immediately. The same may be said of the honour that is done to Him in the saints, in various ways, or again, of the service which we may render to Him in the persons of the poor or miserable or ignorant, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, or by almsdeeds, Masses, and works of satisfaction for the relief of the holy souls in Purgatory. And perhaps the most obvious of all the uses which can be made of the wealth of this world for this holy purpose, is the expenditure of money in almsdeeds to the poor. In all these ways the mammon of iniquity may be employed, and by means of its employment we make friends for ourselves of those who have a right to the Kingdom of Heaven, and who by their intercessions may help us in our own time of need by opening to us the gates of mercy and of the homes of eternal rest. This is the true use which we are intended to make of this mammon, which is called the mammon of iniquity because it is so often the instrument of wickedness, or the result of injustice. It is not meant that it is enough to spend unjust gains in charitable ways, if we have not fully repaired any injustice of which we may have been guilty. The steward in the parable acted unjustly to his lord, and so his kindness to his lord's

debtors would not have delivered him from sin. He is put before us as an example of discernment and prudence, not of justice, and the point in his history which is impressed on us that he made the best of his opportunities, and by that means secured himself from destitution.

The words of our Lord, "for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light," seem to fall from His sacred lips as a passing remark, and He does not dwell on them nor expand them. They are obviously the explanation of the reason for which the lord in the parable commended the unjust steward. Not of course that the commendation was an instance of the superior wisdom of worldlings, but that the steward had shown that superior wisdom in what he had done, and this the lord, himself a man of the world, could not help applauding as a clever action. The words themselves show that perfect intelligence of mankind in our Lord of which St. John speaks when he says, that "He knew what was in man." He knew not only the workings of all the lower elements in human nature in those who are not what He calls the children of light, but also how much there is of human foolishness and weakness in the children of light themselves. It is not said that the children of light are prudent and thoughtful, and the children of this world still more so, in their generation. The children of light have too often not the common prudence and forethought which reason requires, while in the children of the world these qualities are exercised in a high degree of perfection. The ends of the two classes of men are very different, but it is wisdom, and not prudence,

that guides us in the choice of ends. The two classes have indeed different ends before them, and no doubt the ends pursued by the children of light are the only true ends which men can reasonably seek. But when we compare the two classes as to the means which they use to gain their ends, the diligence, the cleverness, the perseverance, the energy, the concentration which they bring to the use of their means and opportunities, then the truth of our Lord's remark becomes but too clear and certain.

Look at the care and thought which the man who studies to be rich brings to the choice of investments for his money, always seeking for what is at once safest and most profitable, and compare it to the reckless haphazard way in which the Christian spends his time, only anxious to get through it somehow or other in the most pleasant and least laborious manner! Look at the care which the man of business takes to keep his accounts well balanced day by day, or week by week, the pains he takes to set mistakes right, and to get rid of debts and encumbrances which hinder his prosperous career, and compare it with the negligence of so many about the care of their conscience, with its accounts uninspected and accumulating day after day, and yet left unexamined, to meet them at the end of his life! Look at the indifference to present toil and temporary hardships and inconveniences with which professional men are content to tie themselves to desks or to some laborious profession for the greater part of their life, for the sake of the hope, so seldom realized, that they may gain a few years of enjoyment and ease at the end

of their days! And compare this with the way in which so many of the children of light let themselves be engrossed in the most frivolous and empty pleasures, which are often far worse than empty and frivolous, and put aside for them the thought of being rich unto God, and labouring for the eternal goods! But it would be a long meditation indeed that could fully exhaust these words of our Lord.

The words which are translated in our version by the English words, "in their generation," are very important for the intelligence of this saying, and require some explanation. The proper rendering would be "unto," or "towards," their generation, and the word generation means the men of their time, or of their kind. What is said is that the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with the men of the class of life to which they belong, than the children of light in dealing with their own "generation," in the same sense. The steward understood the men he had to deal with in his lord and his lord's debtors, and so got out of his difficulty by playing his cards well with them. The children of light should act as he did, so far as to use their opportunities, their means, the occasions which meet them, so as to escape, by the use thus made of them, the dangers which threaten them, so as to provide thereby safely for the future which awaits them. The generation for which they live is God and His saints, or His friends the poor. We are all under sentence of dismissal from our present office of stewards of our Lord's goods in this life. We are so to use them, in the time that remains to us, as to make ourselves stand well with

the generation into whose presence we are hastening, there to abide for ever.

Our Lord appears to have added to the simple narrative of the parable, or history, of the Wicked Steward, a discourse on the subject of true and false riches, and their use, of which St. Luke gives us a very succinct account, and which attracted the attention and criticism of the Pharisees. “ He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater, and he that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater. If then you have not been faithful in the unjust mammon, who will trust you with that which is the true? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

This discourse may be considered as addressed to the disciples in general, and to contain principles which apply to a larger range of subjects than is suggested by the use of the word mammon only. The first lesson which is conveyed in this passage is one which grows naturally out of the story of the unjust steward. It is that we are all stewards, and have a Master over us to Whom we have to give an account of all that we have and are. The steward of whom we have just heard was accused of treating his lord’s gifts as if they were his own, for if they had been his own he could not have been called to an account, and threatened with punishment for malversation. He had a right, if he so chose, to squander what was his own, and this is just the

right which we falsely assume as to what is not our own. For all that we have in the way of powers, faculties, talents, opportunities, is committed to us by God with the intention that it is so to be used by us as a trust from Him for which we are to give an account, and for the purpose of preparing for ourselves treasures, or resources, in the next world. Again, there are three contrasts expressed in the words before us. In the first place, there is the contrast between greater goods and lesser goods, as to which our Lord says that faithfulness in the case of the inferior grade of goods is an earnest of faithfulness in the use of the higher. Then there is the contrast between true goods and false goods, true riches and false, as to which He says that if we have not been faithful in the unjust mammon we shall not have committed to us the true. In the third place there is the contrast between that which is another's and that which is our own, as to which He says, that if we have not been faithful in taking care of the property of another, who will give us that which is our own? We have, therefore, to see how these three contrasts may be made to apply to the goods of which our Lord is speaking.

The goods of the next life are undoubtedly great and infinite in comparison to anything that we can have entrusted to us here and now. There is no true comparison between the temporal and the eternal, between that which is heavenly and that which is of earth. But it does not follow that a right appreciation of this truth would lead us to an entire contempt and neglect of these inferior goods, for the reason assigned by our Lord. That reason is, that by our faithfulness or unfaithfulness in their

use will be measured the manner in which we are to be treated with regard to the eternal goods. Thus His words have a deeper meaning than may occur to us at first sight. It is true that, ordinarily speaking, men are first proved as to their faithfulness in small things, and then are trusted with greater. But it is not necessarily and inevitably true that faithfulness in small matters is an earnest of faithfulness in larger matters. For the temptation to unfaithfulness is much increased when the matter which is committed to us is much larger than before, and a man who might be faithful to his trust in the case of a lesser sum of money might be unable to resist when he had the opportunity of enriching himself enormously by an act of dishonesty. So it is in this world with its passing goods.

But in the case of which our Lord speaks there is no danger of this. We secure the greater goods by faithfulness in the use of the lesser. For the faithfulness of which He speaks in the use of temporal goods which are entrusted to us by God is, at the very same time, faithfulness as to eternal interests, which are to be entrusted to us if we are faithful in the others. Our faithfulness in the case of the unjust mammon is, at the same time, faithfulness as to the true riches which are secured to us thereby. But if we are unfaithful in the use of the comparatively worthless goods of this world, we lose thereby our claim on the imperishable and most precious riches of the spiritual kingdom. The truth which we are to understand is that these earthly goods are committed to us, as it is more than once said in the parables of our Lord, to traffic with for our Master's use. They are the

talents and the pounds for which we are to give an account. If we have multiplied them for Him, we are to be rewarded, if we have not multiplied them we are disgraced and punished. This is one of the truths conveyed in the other contrast which is here drawn for us, that between what belongs to another and what belongs to ourselves. When we understand that all our resources and powers are merely entrusted to us to be used for the glory of God, we begin to have a right intelligence as to our responsibilities and our opportunities, as to the wisdom of recognizing our stewardship, and of striving above all things to be found faithful therein.

There is also another meaning in which earthly goods are said not to be our own, and are contrasted in this respect to the goods of the spiritual kingdom. For that cannot be called our own which may pass away from us at any moment, which cannot in itself contribute anything to our real being and true enjoyment, make us better or happier, enter into our true life as a means of support or strength or growth or felicity. Yet no temporal goods can become a part of our life or being in this way, and in this sense we cannot make them our own, any more than our bodies can live on stones, or our intelligence feed on what is written in a language which we can neither read nor understand. As far as our true life is concerned, temporal goods can neither enter into it nor take it away. They are like the coin which the shipwrecked mariner found in the wreck from which he had been cast ashore—of no profit whatever to him in his new and solitary existence. But spiritual gifts and goods, although they all come to us from the hand of God, Who can at any

moment take them away, are still our own in this sense, that they contribute to and constitute our real life, our minds can feed on them, our hearts are enlarged and ennobled by them, they elevate and transform our whole existence, and make us, as the Apostle writes, partakers of a Divine nature so far above our own. They live in us and make us live, as the air which we breathe or the blood which runs through our veins. In this sense then, also, we may understand the contrast implied in the words, "That if we are not faithful in that which is another's, who will give us what is our own?" And this kind of language is found in many of our Lord's sayings about the rewards of the next life, for He says that the faithful servants are to be set over ten cities or five, or are to be set by their lord over all his goods, in words which imply power, possession, authority. And this language may help to raise our thoughts concerning the eternal goods. Our Lord said to the Pharisees, when they asked about the coming of the Kingdom of God, that the Kingdom of God was within us. It is not something external, but something which can never be separated from us, its life, its functions, its exercises, its joys are indeed our own, because it consists in union with God Who gives it.

Our Lord concludes this discourse, of which, as has been said, it is probable that we have but a short summary, by words which, like many others which occur in the Gospel of St. Luke at this time, are repeated from the Sermon on the Mount. "No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and

mammon." The two masters, between whom we have to choose, are God and Satan, who rules us under the name of the world, or riches, or ambition, or pleasure, and the like. The two masters cannot be to us precisely the same, for our hearts are made for God and the true goods which His service secures us, they are not made for Satan or for the false goods by means of which he imposes upon us. Thus our hearts can love God, and to love God is to hate what He hates, sin and Satan. They cannot love Satan, and the falsehoods on which he would have them feed themselves. The choice that has to be made is between the service of God, on the one hand, God, Whom we can love, and this implies the hatred of His rebellious and lying rival, and, on the other hand, the holding to or following of Satan, not the loving him, and this holding to Satan implies contempt and neglect of God. The heart cannot be satisfied with the false goods, but men can be persuaded to think them true, and thus to hold to them. In this case they live on without love and satisfaction, in a perpetual restlessness, seeking, like the poor Prodigal, to fill themselves with the husks of swine. The two services are as incompatible as light and darkness, the choice must be made between God and mammon.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

St. Luke xvi. 19—31; *Story of the Gospels*, § 116.

OUR Lord seems next to have gone back in thought to the subject of the history of the Unjust Steward, which had brought on Him the ridicule of the men whom He was thus reproofing. For the story which follows seems to be a kind of continuation of that history, in which the cleverness and adroitness of the steward are contrasted with the foolishness of the rich glutton, as he is often termed. And the lesson to be learnt from the one as to the right use of the riches of the world, is the same as that which is taught by the other. There may also, as we shall see, be another and a very deep lesson conveyed in this second parable, if we are so to call it. For there is no reason why this history of Lazarus and the Rich Glutton should not be a simple narrative of facts. Indeed, it would seem most probable that such it is, for otherwise it would be difficult to account for the name of Lazarus being given. Neither our Lord, nor the Evangelist, speaks of it as a parable at all. The same remark applies to the story of the Unjust Steward, as we have lately said, and to some others of the so-called parables.

"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who lay at his gate, full of sores, desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no one did give him. Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores." Here then the story begins with the most perfect contrast between these two men, in their abode, their circumstances, their condition, their treatment by others. The one has all that he can desire, and he enjoys it for his own pleasure, food, raiment, abode, service, health. The days are to him one tranquil succession of enjoyments. He is not said to be vicious, or unjust, or cruel, or ambitious. He is simply wrapt up in the enjoyment of what, as he considers, is his own, in absolute indifference to the claims of others on his charity, to his duties in their regard, to the responsibilities of his position, to his opportunities of providing for the next world by the use which he makes of this. The other is destitute, friendless, afflicted, homeless. His condition must have been known to the rich man and to his servants, but he gets not the slightest relief. His only friends are in the brute creation, the dogs who come and lick the sores which cover him. He lay at the gate of the rich man, and would have been fed plentifully enough with the crumbs from his table. He desired to be fed with them, but no man gave to him. He was not driven away, he was simply ignored.

We are here presented by our Lord Himself with a picture of the social contrast which is always before our eyes. It has been thus from the beginning, and so it will ever be. In our own time and

country it presents itself as conspicuously as ever, only that the two extremes in the contrast are exaggerated in modern times, and in consequence of an un-Christian civilization. The rich are now more rich, the poor are more poor. There is a greater luxury and extravagance, and sometimes, certainly, greater selfishness and recklessness, among the wealthy. On the other hand, the squalor and misery of poverty are largely increased. There is also another feature—the class represented by Lazarus has become dangerous. It has grown in numbers, in power, in intelligence, and in its capacity for combination. This might not be mischievous, if, at the same time, the poorer class were deeply penetrated with religious principles. But it is not so. They are more than ever the prey to false teaching and the victims of the active propaganda which is carried on against faith and morality. Their principles of law, order, authority, and obedience, are weakened and undermined. They begin to ask strange questions about the inequality with which the good things of the world are kept in the hands of a few, and to raise their voices first and then their hands to remedy the apparent injustice. And yet no action of theirs can remedy the evil of which they complain. Let them upset the fabric of society and establish for a moment their visionary equality—they will not benefit themselves, but only increase their misery. The old divisions will return again after a period of violence and lawlessness. There will still be the rich man with Lazarus at his gate. For God has provided His own way of setting the inequality right, and no other way can succeed but His.

Inequality is the law of His Kingdom in Heaven and on earth, an inequality which is established by Him, which gives Him great glory, and advances immensely the happiness and mutual charities of angels and of men. It is the rule in Heaven, the rule in the Church on earth, the rule in human society. The angels are arrayed in hierarchies, the Church has her rulers and her subjects, her ministers and the classes to whom they minister, and human society by His ordinance is organized in the same way, each one having his own gifts, his own vocation, his own duties to the community, his own particular share in influence and in property. When God came on earth, He made His choice among the classes, and He chose to be poor. Thus He exalted and blessed and consecrated the condition of the great mass of men. On the other hand, He often spoke of the danger of riches, and said that it was hard for a rich man to enter His Kingdom. It seemed almost, if He could be unfair at all, that He had given the rich the last place and the poorest chance of salvation and of Heaven. And yet, after all, He has provided for the rich man as well as for Lazarus, and has put it in his power to make this life happy for his neighbour, and by so doing to secure the happiness of the next world for himself. Heaven is the heritage of the poor and the afflicted here, if they bear their poverty and affliction with patience and resignation, and without revolting in their minds and hearts against the arrangements of Providence in their regard. And their rich brethren will be received by them into the eternal habitations, if they use in charity the abundance of the goods of this world. These are given them, not for

themselves, but as the stewards of God for the maintenance of the right order in this society which He has made unequal, in order that the one class may minister to the other the offices of brotherly love, and so glorify the God of love and peace in a nobler way than would have been possible if there had been no poor and afflicted to call for compassion and relief. This is the social science of the Christian Kingdom, foolishness indeed in the eyes of the philosophers of the world, but powerful for the salvation of those who have riches to administer, because it makes them see and serve God in their poor brethren, makes them understand the dangers and the duties of their state, delivers them from the blindness and selfishness and worldliness, and hardness of heart and forgetfulness of God which the possession of riches naturally engenders. If they have sins to account for, they can redeem them by almsgiving, and they can contribute in the same way to the security of themselves and the society in which they live, by promoting goodwill and mutual love between class and class. And the poor, on the other hand, whose condition offers far greater opportunity for the practice of all virtues than any other condition, are meant in their turn to glorify Him by their patience, their unworldly faith, and their grateful charity.

Thus has our Lord drawn in a few lines a picture of what must ever be in the world, while at the same time that He tells us of the rich man and his relations to Lazarus, He has touched the misery and the blindness and the folly of men such as he was. His relations to Lazarus were simply that he ignored him and forgot him, and so committed the folly of

those who have a treasure lying at their feet, more precious than the riches of a thousand worlds, which they do not stoop to take up, while they are on the eve of utter ruin and irreparable desolation for the want of it. Lazarus lay at his gate, and it would have cost him nothing to feed him and clothe him and tend him. But, such is the deceptiveness of wealth, he had never once thought of giving him a crumb from his table. This is, as it were, the first scene in the narrative which our Lord sets before His covetous mockers. The next step in the story is another contrast, exactly the reverse of the former.

This next step in the story brings us into the presence of death. "*And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. And the rich man also died, and was buried in Hell.*" Our Lord does not tell us of the virtues practised by Lazarus in his misery. They are sufficiently indicated by the fact that he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom, the receptacle for the souls of those who died in grace and peace with God before the descent of our Lord into the lower world after His Passion. If Lazarus had been stirred by his sufferings to impatience, want of resignation, murmurings against the justice and goodness of God, envy of the rich man, despair, and the like, he would not have been fit to be received into the bosom of Abraham. His condition in this world had been chosen for him by God in His Fatherly care over him, and it was a condition fraught with a crowd of graces and opportunities of merit to which he had been enabled to correspond. He had borne his cross in faith and hope, and was

now to receive his reward. On the other hand, we know that the rich man had misused his opportunities. He had taken the good things of this world as his own, and enjoyed them without gratitude, for if he had been grateful to God, he would have used them to God's glory. He had used them without intelligence, as the brutes might use them, for if he had been intelligent as to their use, he would not have neglected the poor beggar who lay at his gate. He had thought of nothing but the good estate and treatment of his body, for if he had thought of his soul, he would have prepared himself for the judgment of God by making himself powerful friends by the use of the unjust mammon.

Thus his faults were, in the main, faults of omission, the consequence of his blindness and foolishness and ignorance of his real position. Nothing more indeed would have been requisite to plunge him into the gulf of positive sins of commission, luxury, pride, impurity, injustice, and others. But of these we are not told. The words of our Lord imply that what he mentions concerning him was enough to bring on him the dreadful lot of the blind and thoughtless children of the world. Death came on him in the midst of his enjoyments. "The rich man also died, and was buried in Hell." That is, instead of the angels, who might have borne him also into the bosom of his father Abraham, a saint who had been as rich as himself, but had made a good use of his riches, the evil spirits seized his soul, and took him to their own home in Hell. Although the use of the word Hell in itself does not make it certain that the rich man was in the place of the lost souls, and although some authors have thought

that he might have been in Purgatory, it seems safer to follow the common interpretation, in which the word is taken in its strict sense. The grounds of the other opinion will be mentioned by-and-bye.

It has been said that the narrative before us may be the relation of actual facts of which our Lord was aware. If this is so, we may suppose that His words are framed in exact conformity to the real conditions which await the souls of men after their departure from this world. He would see before Him the receptacles of the various classes of souls which pass into the unseen world, and He speaks as if the truths concerning them were familiar to His audience. It has often been said that He does not put forward any new doctrine as to points which were already well known to the Jews. This is one of the reasons why He has not spoken more fully and clearly than He has as to Purgatory, and the devout practice of prayers for the departed, and the like. The Jews understood well enough what He meant by the bosom of Abraham. The bosom of Abraham was the place for the souls who were freed from all guilt and owed no more expiation to the justice of God, but who could not enter Heaven, at the time when this instruction was given, because the gates of Heaven had not yet been thrown open after the Resurrection of our Lord. It was the place of rest and expectation for the saints of God, and as their title to Heaven was founded on their faith, without which no man can be pleasing to Him, it was called the bosom of Abraham, the father of all who have faith. There was no suffering there, nor pain of mind and heart, all was peace, calm, hope, love, happiness, the most blessed

society of the redeemed. Our Lord does not mention the other abode where there was no suffering, but only expectation, the receptacle or Limbus of children and others who have on them no stain save that of original sin. Nor does He mention Purgatory, unless it can be thought, as some have thought, that the rich man was there—the place for those who have died in a state of grace, indeed, but yet with a debt, larger or smaller, to the justice of God which has still to be worked out in suffering. Nor was it necessary that He should do more than mention Hell, properly so called, the place of torment without expiation or hope in which the lost souls must abide for ever.

Here, perhaps, our Lord might have paused, if it had been His object to do no more than to set before the Pharisees who derided His doctrine, the consequences of blindness as to the use of riches in those who possess them. In some respects, He seems to teach us, death itself may not bring perfect enlightenment to such men as the rich glutton. At least He describes him as speaking and reasoning as if he were not altogether awake to the condition to which he had brought himself. But lost souls, like evil spirits, may hide what they know, and speak as if they were not what they are. This man speaks with Abraham as his father, and he can think of the danger of others left behind in the world, whose lot is like what his own had been. "*And lifting up his eyes when he was in torments, he saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom, and he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.*"

And Abraham said to him, Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is fixed a great chaos, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither." The Greek word which in our version is rendered "chaos," might properly be rendered "chasm." That is, there is a great gulf of separation, which is fixed firmly by the unalterable decree of God, which is that none should pass it. The truth of the condition of separate classes in the next world is here expressed in parabolical language, such as conveys the facts so as to be intelligible to all. Lazarus could not dip his finger in water, as his body was in the grave. Nor could the rich man have his tongue touched with water, as he also was without his body. His petition is foolish and impossible. That is, it is just the kind of petition which a lost soul in torment might make.

His father Abraham speaks to him with perfect kindness and gentleness, calling him son and leaving him without any reproach for his evil conduct in his lifetime. He passes no judgment on him, and, as far as his words go, he gives no more merit to Lazarus than demerit to the rich man. One receives good things now, having received evil before, the other receives evil things now, having received good things before. There is no reproach for his presumption, or for the sort of contempt which he seems still to feel for the beggar, who is to be sent hither and thither for the sake of relieving his pain. Neither is there any exhortation to penitence, or any hope held out of pardon or

remission in his sufferings. Again, the truth as to the impossibility of any intercourse between the two receptacles of departed souls is put gently. There is a great chaos fixed between them, which makes the passage from one to the other impossible, and nothing is said of the evil state of the soul which makes it unworthy of all help and incapable of profiting by any charity. The language is as gentle as that which St. Jude mentions as used by St. Michael to Satan when they contended about the body of Moses.¹ Indeed so gentle is it, that, as we shall presently see, it has been made one ground of the opinion mentioned above, that the rich man may have been in Purgatory and not in the torments of Hell.

The answer of Abraham, however, though gentle, as has been said, is rather an example of that abstinence from all judgment of others which is characteristic of the saints than any implied acquittal of the rich man. When we examine the truths which it alleges we can see how it is so. There is no reason why Abraham should not acknowledge him as a son. For it would be a part of his guilt, in the eyes of God, and an aggravation of his punishment, that he would know himself to have been and still to be by nature a child of Abraham, brought up in the true faith, and therefore without excuse on the score of ignorance as to the responsibilities and duties which he had neglected. Abraham reminds him of the truth that he in his lifetime had received his share of good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, and he also reminds him that he is now in torments and Lazarus in comfort.

¹ St. Jude 9.

Lazarus had been tormented by hunger, but the rich man, who now begs his interference for a drop of water to cool his tongue, had never thought of sending him a crumb of bread. Now their conditions are reversed. That so it was with the two, implied that they both deserved their present condition. For Abraham is speaking of the arrangements and decrees of God, Who can do no wrong.

Abraham sets forth, with ample sufficiency, the principles of God's government in the distribution of goods and ills. God has numberless goods of various kinds and degrees to distribute, and among them are the good things of this world and of this life. He often gives them in reward for natural virtues and good actions, either when they do not merit an eternal reward, or when He foreknows that those who have practised them will so shape their lives as to make themselves incapable of the life of bliss in Heaven. In this way it is that He leaves no good unrewarded in some way or other, although so many who are at present good in disposition and in conduct will not reach His Kingdom hereafter. This man had whatever reward he deserved in this life. He may have done many good things, for which he was paid here, paid, moreover, in a way which did not at all preclude his using the wealth and affluence that was given him for the true and highest interests of his soul. He might have been charitable with his wealth, he might have mortified himself in the midst of his good cheer, or denied it to himself altogether. There was nothing to force him to waste his opportunities. Nor, on the other hand, was there anything to force the will of Lazarus to make the good use of his afflictions

which we know he had made, simply from the fact that he was rewarded as he was. God distributes temporal evils with the same wisdom and equity as temporal goods. They are often sent in mercy, either to prevent us from sinning or to give us opportunities of expiating sins by suffering in a spirit of penitence. They are sent as chastisements, to arouse the soul to a sense of the evil it has done. They are sent as trials and opportunities of the practice of and the growth in virtue, or they are sent to perfect the character after the pattern of our suffering Lord. In some or all of these ways they had been sent to Lazarus, and he had used them to the profit of his soul. He was now reaping the reward of his patience and resignation, his charity for others, his detachment from earthly goods. And so he is now comforted. If a lost soul is capable of any consolation, it might be found in the consideration of the justice and goodness of God, which underlie the rules of the government of which Abraham speaks. But in any case he represents the truth, and he represents also the power and sovereign rights of God, Whose laws cannot be overruled. The rich man could not gainsay a word that was said.

This is the first part of the answer of Abraham. The second is equally simple and peremptory. "Besides all this, between us and you there is fixed a great chaos, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor you thence come hither." These words touch the two great reasons why the petition of the rich man, that Lazarus might be sent to touch his tongue with the tip of his finger, was rejected. First, such an alleviation is contrary to

the decree of Him Who has fixed the great chasm between the saved and the lost in the next world. God has appointed the time of probation for all, and after that the Judgment and the execution of the sentence, a sentence which is irreversible. The rich man mentions his thirst as his great torment, because, as it seems, his chief sin, the cause of countless other sins, had been gluttony. The punishment of gluttony was in kind like the indulgence for which it was inflicted, and it was so with all the other sufferings of the lost man, which were not to be alleviated for ever. He might have saved himself from them while he lived, now no one can save him from them. And again, one of the consequences of the fixing of the chasm, represented by the impossibility of any passage from one side to the other, is that after the lot of the soul is finally fixed, there can be no change. For there can be no change from an evil state to a better state of the soul without Divine grace, and no grace can enter Hell. The wills there are all immutably fixed, as are the wills of the blessed in Heaven, and thus all change in the souls that suffer in Hell is shut out. And, if a lost soul in all its inveterate malice could be transported to Heaven without any change in itself, Heaven itself would be to it the worst of hells.

“And he said, Then, father, I beseech thee that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torments. And Abraham said to him, They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them. But he said, No, father Abraham, but if one went to them from the dead, they will do penance. And

he said to him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they believe if one rise again from the dead." These words have been understood by many as furnishing a further argument for the opinion of the ultimate salvation of the poor soul who spoke them. It has been alleged that they show a certain amount of charitable and disinterested forethought for the souls of the five brethren, a desire that something may be done for them which he thinks might save them, and enable them to escape the misery to which he is himself doomed. Whereas, it may be said, if he were altogether lost without hope, he would have been incapable of charity to his brethren, and if he could have thought of them at all, it might have been to desire that they might come and share his own sufferings. The consideration of the questions which are thus raised by the prayer of the rich man to Abraham may open to us many lessons which we might otherwise fail to catch.

Some of the Fathers have thought that although this rich man was in Hell, where there can be no exercise of supernatural virtue, he still retained the natural virtue of wishing well to those who were nearest to him, and thus could wish that his brethren might avoid the lot which had fallen to himself. He might know that he himself might have escaped it, and that others, in the same position, might escape it, and he may have wished that his brethren might do so rather than others. And it is to be observed that he does not give any reason for their conversion, but that they may not come into that place of torment. And although the wills of the lost souls are irrevocably fixed on evil and not on good, it

may be thought that the malice of their will extends only over the same range in the next world as in this. Thus, for example, if a man has been sensual or covetous in his life, but not envious or given up to anger, he would not have in the next world the intensity of these last evils which others might have whom they have dominated here. This is the opinion of those who see some natural good in the interest manifested by the rich man for the conversion of his brothers.

Others, however, do not see in the petition before us anything more than an act of selfishness. For it is certain that the sight and company of other lost souls is a part of the torment of the damned, as the sight and company of the other blessed in Heaven is a part of the joy of each glorious soul. As the saints might desire the salvation of others on this account, so the lost souls may dread the damnation of others for their own sakes. And this might be much more so in the case of brothers. For this suffering soul may have led them to evil by his own example or direct influence, he may have failed in his duty to warn them as a brother, his sins and their sins may have been mixed up together, while they feasted and enjoyed themselves without a thought of duty or of God, helping one another to despise the poor, ridicule almsdeeds, and live as if they had not received the truth and the law of God. Thus the presence of his brothers would have been an increase of his torments, and when he asked that they might be warned by Lazarus, he was asking that he might be spared that possible increase.

There is also a third way in which this prayer of

the rich man may be explained, without attributing it to true charity. Some writers consider it as a kind of hidden complaint against God, for not having given to him any warning like that which he asks for his brothers. It is as if he had said, "If men are to be plunged into this torment for living as I have lived, at all events they might be told of it in some certain way, and I ask that my brothers may fare better in this respect than myself, and that you will send Lazarus to enlighten them as I could wish to have been enlightened, especially as you tell me that I am not even to be allowed that slight alleviation which I ask for myself." This interpretation may seem at first sight to be far-fetched. But it is very consistent indeed with what may be reasonably supposed as to the state of mind of the lost souls. There is about the whole behaviour of the rich man a certain disorder and strangeness, which show themselves in the presumptuous freedom with which he speaks to Abraham, in the utter absence of any sorrow for sin while he suffers its punishment, in his exaggerated ideas as to what is possible for his relief, his silence as to God Whom he has offended, his coolness in suggesting that Lazarus is to be sent about hither and thither for him, as if he was still his superior in condition, the entire unsuitableness of the means which he proposes for his own relief and the conversion of his brethren, and the like. We seem almost to be reading an account of what has passed at a modern *séance*, when a miserable *medium* has been receiving communications as to the unseen world from some still more miserable soul who, as it is supposed, is allowed to impart them. The words are not always openly impious

and satanic, but there is silence as to God, it is taken for granted that the evils of the next world can be alleviated and remedied, sometimes it is even openly said that they do not last for ever, and the souls who make the communications assume an air of happiness and of charity, and even pretend to love our Lord. All is dreamy, distorted, frivolous, unsubstantial, futile, inconsequent; matters of little importance are made much of, the true interests of the soul are ridiculed or left out of sight. There is not a trace of humility or contrition, or reverence, in the description, and it ends by the proposal of opening an intercourse between the dead and the living which has always been denounced in Sacred Scripture, and an implied complaint that the living are not sufficiently provided for in the ordinary government of God with knowledge as to the judgment which awaits sinners and worldlings in the next world. Viewed in this light, the effort of the rich man to have Lazarus sent to his brethren is not at all inconsistent with the received opinion that he was suffering in Hell when he made it.

What has been said must suffice as an answer to the difficulty, if difficulty it can be called, which consists in the apparent charity of the request made by the rich man in Hell that Lazarus might be sent to his five brethren. Something also has already been said as to the substance of the petition. It certainly showed a presumption in judgment as well as importunity in urging such a request, when he must have known that it was certainly contrary to the usual rule of God's dealings with mankind. The rich man speaks as if he knew best how mankind

should be dealt with, much as we sometimes hear worldly people speaking about the arrangements of Providence as if they themselves could manage the world much better than it is managed. The Christian understands that there are many things in the Providential order which he cannot understand, and that he can see at any given time only a part of a large system of arrangements, and not the whole. Even in things which seem to him difficult, he falls back on the truth of the wisdom, power, goodness, and love of God as quite sufficient to justify His government in the eyes of His children. He knows how to say with our Lord, "Even so, Father, for so it hath seemed good unto Thee." He is afraid to think of improvements in the ordinary methods of Providence, being convinced that he has no intelligence or wisdom, and that what might seem to Him best might turn out worst.

The case is altogether contrary with that extraordinary intercourse between the living and the dead after which so many imperfect Christians so constantly crave. The proposal of the rich man amounted to this. Sacred Scripture all through sets God before us as most hostile to anything of this kind. Christian instinct leads us to ask the help and the prayers of the saints and angels in all due reverence, and our whole lives are lighted up by the occasions on which that help has been forthcoming and efficacious. We know too that we have the power of helping the suffering souls in Purgatory by our prayers and sacrifices of various kinds, but here again all is done with due reverence to the order which God has established, and we do not practise either the devotion to the saints and

angels, or the intercessions which may benefit the souls of Purgatory, with any object of curiosity, or craving after what it is forbidden us to know. And for what is matter of doctrine, that which our faith is to feed upon, and the like, we are content with the teaching which God has provided for us in the Church. The granting of the petition of the rich man, might have encouraged spiritual curiosity, and even seemed to sanction necromancy. As a matter of experience, it is found that the habit of seeking after these illicit sources of knowledge has a very bad effect, even on those good persons who are sometimes thus led away. Its least evils are the dissipation of the soul, frivolity, and unhealthy excitement. Its worst consequences are the weakening of faith, delusions, false doctrine, and immorality, which is usually more or less to be found where this spirit is rife, and where it is indulged for any length of time. It is sometimes thought that it at least confirms men in the belief in an unseen world. But the unseen world which is thus apprehended is a world full of lies. It is said to strengthen men in the truth of the spirituality and separate existence of the soul. What are its effects as to the rights, the law, the government of God, the revelation which He has made concerning Himself, and the authority of the Church which is commissioned by God to deliver to us all the salutary truths on these subjects which it is useful for us to know ?

The answer of Abraham, though courteous and gentle, is yet quite peremptory. He might have pointed out many faults in the manner of making the proposal, and in the proposal itself, but it was not his business to reproach the poor sufferer, who

was incapable of merit or of charity. He simply says, "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them." For this is the way that God has provided for them, therefore the best way, the way which they will be helped by God's grace to use profitably and meritoriously. Men are to be led to use their wills rightly by the enlightenment of their minds by the eternal truths, set before them by the Word of God through an appointed organ, and accepted by faith. Moses and the Prophets, the Scriptures presented by the Church. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. The eternal truths were to be accepted by men like those of whom Abraham was speaking by faith, and then the mere acceptance of them would have been a meritorious act accompanied by grace. The truths themselves, being the revelation of God concerning His own method of government, would have sunk into the soul as the seed spoken of in the parable, and there have fructified and leavened the whole mind and life. If truth finds no impediment in the soul, it produces its fruit, thirty-fold, sixty-fold, a hundred-fold, by the assistance of grace. This is the faith that overcomes the world, that makes men spiritual giants, and enables them easily to turn aside the shafts of the various temptations and delusions of which the world is full. On the other hand, if Lazarus had been sent back from the grave, his word would have been only the word of a man. He would seem to have been sent to supersede and improve upon the authorized organs of revelation. He would have spoken only with his own authority, and have had no weight with the five rich men. His word would

have lacked the Divine power which belongs to the Word of God, and it would have conveyed no grace to the minds of the hearers on which they could have formed their faith and amended their lives.

It is in this that, as it seems, we must see the main point of the answer of Abraham to the second petition of the rich man. His five brethren would not have listened to the warning of Lazarus, nor even to their own brother if he had been allowed to visit them. They would have had no grace to help them to do this, and would probably have become more and more hardened in their forgetfulness of God. Thus the interference which was suggested in their favour would have made them worse, would have increased their guilt, and, in due proportion, their punishment also when they came to rejoin their brother, and thus would have added to his torments as well as increased their own. The methods which God has chosen for the conversion of souls not only are to be accepted because they are His appointments, and because they are, as it were, freighted with grace. They are also the best in themselves, the most adapted of all to the conditions of human life and to the state and requirements of the souls of men, whether they are used to preserve them in virtue or to reclaim them from sin.

In this instruction, which we may consider as historical, with parabolical language sometimes used, our Lord has wrapped up a whole series of saving truths. It occupies a dozen verses in a chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, and yet it contains matter for a whole treatise, and for many long meditations. We may try to subjoin here the truths which it suggests

on two or three points of practical and universal importance. We will take first the truths at which it hints concerning the thoughts and feelings of the departed towards the friends whom they have left behind them in this world. We may pass next to the thoughts and feelings of these friends themselves towards the departed. And the great principle embodied in the words of Abraham about Moses and the Prophets may furnish matter for a third consideration.

Our Lord's discourse sets before us a soul whom we consider to have been lost, full of anxiety about the brethren whom he has left behind him, "lest they also come into this place of torment." As far as the words go, and the lesson which they contain, they might be applied with equal truth to the anxiety for their friends which is felt by souls in Purgatory, all of whom are undoubtedly full of charity in their degree, of charity especially for those with whom they have been most tenderly connected, over whom they may have had influence for good or for evil, and who are living on in a state of comparative blindness as to the dangers which beset them, and especially as to the terrible gravity of the punishments of the unseen world, even when those punishments are not to last for ever. If the five brethren of the rich man could have been aware of his anxiety for them, whether that were merely selfish or naturally good and kind, surely the natural effect which ought to have followed would have been to make them careful to avoid all conduct of the same kind with that which, in his case, had led to so much irreparable misery. That is, if they had hitherto followed his example or been companions

in his folly, they would have understood that his wish now was that they should do their best to avoid all such courses, and lead a life entirely different from that which he had led. His example would be to them a warning, and not an encouragement, and if they had any tender love for him at all, they would have shown it best of all by going exactly in the contrary direction. And it would be the same with matters of belief as with matters of practice. If he had believed amiss, he would desire them to believe rightly, and if he had lived carelessly, he would desire them to live in the careful observance of the Divine Law. Nor could they inflict a more cruel wound on him, if he was capable of being wounded, than by using his own example as a pretext for disregarding the warning of his present lot.

The next world is the land of light, so far as that there are no more delusions there, whether as to creeds and churches, or as to matters of conduct. Even the lost souls know there what is true and what is right. And the souls in Purgatory, in like manner, can be under no delusion as to any of these matters. There may be some there, for instance, who have been baptized, and passed their lives in good faith as Christians, and though dying outside the visible unity of the Church, they may have been spared the full penalty of conscious and deliberate schism on account of their imperfect knowledge of the truth. And there may be others on earth, in the same position, perhaps fortifying themselves therein by alleging the example of their friends. What a misery to these last, to know themselves quoted against the truth! What a joy to them,

when they find those whom they may have kept back setting their example aside, and submitting to the grand and simple evidences by which, in the appointment of God, the one true Church is known in all the world! And so also in matters of conduct. Parents, whether in Hell or in Purgatory, may have failed grievously or venially in the education and management of their children. How foolish must those children be, and how unkind to the memory of their parents, even to the extent of adding to their sufferings, if they use their example or teaching to justify themselves in habits of vice or laxity or neglect of duty, instead of considering what their mind on those subjects now must be, when they are in the fulness of light, and when all delusions have passed away.

In truth, we know well enough, without any one coming from the dead, what the departed would say to us. They could add nothing to the law of God, whether as to faith or as to practice. Their own experience could not make the eternal truths more true than they are of themselves. Their experience makes them terrible to themselves, but personal experience is incommunicable. If we put a finger into a fire, we know what fire is by a new kind of knowledge, but we cannot describe it to others. There have been in the history of the Church persons who have been allowed to see for a few moments what goes on in the next world, and they have come back to do the severest penance for the rest of their lives. Their witness is only of use to those who already believe, and are well disposed to act on their faith. That is, they produce the effect of a fervent preacher, full of faith and zeal. Such

preachers the Church can at any time furnish, and as their word is the Word of God, it can pierce the hearts of men as nothing else can pierce them. What we know concerning the departed is that if they have any charity at all, they wish us to believe and live as the Catholic Church teaches, even if they have themselves never received that teaching in its fulness.

But, if it is foolish to ask for messages from the departed, it is very wholesome indeed to meditate on their state and to consider in how many ways they might wish to change the examples or the teaching which they have left behind them. It is one of the saddest of thoughts, in this regard, that the "evil which men do, lives after them," in its effects on others, and that it may even be a constant torment to them that it is so. Christians have a great consolation in the power which they possess of helping the suffering souls who are not in Hell, in so many various ways, among which that of correcting in themselves anything which they may have caught of bad or of imperfect from their example, is not the least powerful. They are merciful to themselves in this, and they are merciful to their friends also. A soul that has, without deliberate mortal sin, misled others, or hindered them in good, may be doomed to suffer severely until the effects of such guidance are done away. This thought makes their state an additional call on our charity, beyond the many others which are suggested by the salutary thought of what they may be suffering. Our Lord must have had some special purpose in setting forth this account of the world beyond the grave, which was not directly called for

by any question, and in particular in giving us this insight into the feelings of the dead to the living. It is clear that He meant it all for our instruction. He has nowhere painted the pains of Purgatory, though He has said a few words which intimate how severe and how inexorable they are. He has spoken strongly indeed about the pains of Hell, and He has left us to draw the inference from His words that, inasmuch as they differ in degree rather than in kind from the pains of sense in Purgatory, those also are very terrible. If the brethren of the rich man had been pious Jews, they would probably have done much in the way of almsdeeds and sacrifices and prayers for his soul, much which could not benefit him in his actual state, but which would return on themselves in blessings for their charity. And if he had been in Purgatory, they would have helped him most efficaciously. Whatever might be the charity of a good Jew, certainly the charity of a Christian ought to surpass it, and the means which are at our disposal for aiding the holy departed are far more abundant and powerful than any which the Jews possessed. By bringing in this account of the sufferings and needs of the rich man, for which there was no alleviation, our Lord seems to have meant to point our attention to the sufferings in the unseen world in general, trusting to our Christian instincts that the mention of such sufferings would suffice to stimulate our charity. Thus the story of the rich man, though he was not in Purgatory, sets before us afresh all the truths we already know as to those who are there.

In the last place, we are reminded by the words

of Abraham about Moses and the Prophets, of the immense treasures which we possess in this kind, so far more precious than were even the "oracles of God" to the Jewish people, although St. Paul places them first of all in his list of the advantages which that people possessed in comparison with the Gentiles. The "oracles of God" are indeed increased to us, for besides Moses and the Prophets we have the New Testament, containing the acts and words of our Lord and His Blessed Mother and the Apostles and Saints. Moreover, the "Word of God" is far more to us than to the Jews, for the Jews had not the great means of grace which we possess in Christian preaching, a method of the conveyance of the truth which was entirely new in the world until our Lord came, and which lives on in the Church with immense graces ensured to those who faithfully speak and who faithfully hear. The Life and teaching of our Lord were expounded by His Apostles, and, in the hands of St. Paul and the other writers of the Epistles, have become the foundation of the moral and doctrinal teaching of the Church.

The devout à Kempis, in a well known passage, tells our Lord that while in the prison of the body, he confesses his need of two things, food and light. He thanks our Lord for helping his weakness by giving His Sacred Body as the refection of the body and mind, and for placing His Word as a light and lantern to his steps. Without these two things, he says, he cannot live, for the Word of God is the light of his soul, and the Blessed Sacrament is to him the Bread of Life. These are the two tables, placed on each side in the treasury of the holy

Church. One is the table of the Sacred Altar, having on it the Holy Bread, the Body of Christ, the other is the table of the Divine Law, containing the sacred doctrine, teaching the right faith, and leading men securely to within the veil, where the Holy of Holies abides.² The Word of God and the sacraments have each their office in the nourishment of the soul. The sacraments may feed us, but we learn about the sacraments from the Word of God. Without the last, we could only use the first ignorantly. Holy Mass, our Crucifix, our Rosary, our Stations, and the like, are lit up for us by the Word of God. The holy seasons bring its chief lessons home to us, day after day, month after month, year after year. Some men can allow themselves to live more than half their days without studying the Scriptures, or listening to the Word of God. The neglect of the sacraments is a terrible evil. But so also is the neglect of the light which makes it possible for the soul to feed as it ought on the sacraments.

But it is not in the Sacred Scriptures alone, or in the Word of God as preached alone, that we find that immense armoury of means of grace and light which answer in our day to the "Moses and the Prophets" of the chosen people. These Divine words seem to teach us the all-sufficiency of the promises of God for the execution of His whole counsel for the redemption of the world. The Church wants no more than she has. She only wants the faithful use by her children of the graces with which she is charged. If the Christian hierarchy and the Christian people were but what the Christian

² A Kempis, iv. 2, 4.

means of grace can make them, she would not only defy all the efforts of her foes to overpower her, but she would win an easy and speedy triumph over all the forces of Hell.

CHAPTER X.

THE PARABLE OF THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW.

St. Luke xviii. 1—8; *Story of the Gospels*, § 123.

IT was apparently in connection with our Lord's instruction about perseverance in prayer that the Parable of the Widow was spoken, which is subjoined by St. Luke.

“And He spoke also a parable to them, that we ought always to pray, and not to faint, saying, There was a judge in a certain city, who feared not God, nor regarded man. And there was a certain widow in that city, and she came to him, saying, Avenge me of my adversary. And he would not for a long time. But afterwards he said within himself, Although I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow is troublesome unto me, I will avenge her, lest continually coming she weary me.”

This widow had some complaint or some petition for redress of an injustice which had been used in her regard, for the setting right of which the action of this magistrate was necessary. It is taken for granted in the parable that her demand was just, yet she could not have justice without the motion of the judge. In those times and countries much was left in the power of such officials, they were often, moreover, accessible to bribes. They expected some

money from the suitors if they were to exert themselves in their behalf. Thus Felix kept St. Paul in prison without trial, hoping to receive some money from him or from his friends. In the case before us, the judge would not take the trouble to hear the widow's plaint, either out of consideration of his duty to God or out of fear of man. That is, he was not afraid of being called to account by any superior, and he had no fear of God.

The word which is rendered in our version "weary me," is the word which signifies properly the striking on the face continually on the same spot, with the effect of producing a serious bruise. It expresses here the continual wearisome solicitation of the poor widow, which in the end broke down the obstinacy of the judge. That is, it expresses the effect produced by incessant importunities on a man who would give in for no other higher consideration. Our Lord means us to understand that our importunity in prayer will of itself have this effect. For God, Who is not as the unjust judge, loves to see us thus persevering and importunate, and will grant to prayer that is thus made graces which He delays to grant when there is not this importunity. The continuance of our petition cannot weary Him, but when we put ourselves to the pains to be importunate He will grant us things which He would not grant otherwise. The delay, which comes, in the case before us, from compassion to others and long-suffering patience, is to us the occasion of greater merit and more complete impetration in the end.

There is something very remarkable about this instruction as given by St. Luke. In the first place,

he distinctly specifies the purpose for which our Lord gave the parable: "That we ought always to pray, and not to faint." In the second place, he subjoins some words of our Lord, which point the lesson of the parable, not to a general instruction on the utility of persevering prayer, but to a particular lesson which is in keeping with the instance of the widow whose story has just been told. "And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith! - And will not God revenge His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He have patience in their regard? I say to you that He will quickly avenge them. But yet the Son of Man, when He cometh, shall He find, think you, faith on earth?" It seems as if the whole parable had been delivered for the sake of these last words. In any case it seems certain that in this passage St. Luke seems to look up, as we may say, from his work to address the Christians of the time for which he wrote, which was probably near the beginning of the great persecution which broke out in various places not very long before the destruction of Jerusalem. He seems to say to them, We are those who ought to pray and not to faint, we are those whom God will speedily deliver and avenge, we are those to whom this parable of our Lord specially applies.

The word "faint" is used in the New Testament by St. Paul alone, except here in St. Luke, to signify the giving up hope and courage under a great trial. "Therefore, having this ministration," he says to the Corinthians,¹ "according as we have obtained mercy we faint not." Again, of the hope of the Resurrection, "For which cause we faint not."²

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 1. ² 2 Cor. iv. 16.

He desires the Ephesians “not to faint at my tribulations for you, which is your glory,”³ and in other places it is used in an exhortation not to be faint or weary in good works. It is just the kind of danger that might beset the Christians in Jerusalem and the neighbourhood in the final days of the Jewish polity, before the heavy blow of the destruction at the hands of the Romans fell upon them. All that we know of the Church of Jerusalem in these latter times bears witness to the extreme hardships under which they were suffering. Their protection against what was almost extermination lay rather in the fear of the Roman authority than in tolerance or kindness towards them on the part of the Jews themselves. It is this that gives its touching character to the Epistle to the Hebrews, that it is evidently addressed to a Church almost ground down to despair by adversity, and not only this, but containing many members who were in danger, from this and perhaps other causes, of abandoning their faith. It may be worth while shortly to collect the passages which seem to justify this statement.

The Epistle begins, as we all know, by the great passage in which the Son of God, sent in human flesh, is exalted above all other messengers of God, and above the angels themselves. But the Apostle soon comes to a practical application of this truth. “Therefore ought we more diligently to observe the things that we have heard, lest perhaps we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels became steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how

³ Ephes. iii. 13.

shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ? which having begun to be declared by the Lord was confirmed to us by them that heard Him, God also bearing them witness by signs and wonders and divers miracles and distributions of the Holy Ghost according to His own will.”⁴ Then follows a passage about the humiliations of Christ (the Passion, and the redemption thereby, being the great stumbling-block to the Jews), and he bids them “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus,” Whom he proceeds to exalt above Moses. “For Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant, but Christ as the Son in His own house, which house are we, if we hold fast the confession and glory of hope unto the end.”⁵ And then he warns them to whom he writes not to tempt God “as in the days of temptation in the desert,” and thus brings in the quotation, “I have sworn in My wrath, If they shall enter into My rest,” and he continues : “Take heed, brethren, lest perhaps there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, to depart from the living God, but exhort one another every day, while it is called to-day, that none of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, yet so if we hold the beginning of His substance firm unto the end.”⁶ He reminds them of those “whose carcasses were overthrown in the desert, and who could not enter in, because of unbelief. Let us fear, therefore, lest the promise being lost of entering into His rest, any of you should be thought to be wanting, for unto us all it hath been declared, in like manner as to them.” Then after a pasagse to prove that the

⁴ Heb. ii. 1—4. ⁵ Heb. iii. 5, 6. ⁶ Heb. iii. 12—14.

promised rest is not over, "that there remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God," he continues: "Let us hasten, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall into the same example of unbelief, for the Word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword,"⁷ and the rest.

St. Paul goes on as before, exalting the character of our Lord, and especially bringing out His priestly office, and then the atonement made by Him, "Who in the days of His flesh, with a strong cry and tears offering up prayers and supplications to Him that was able to save Him from death, was heard for His reverence, and whereas indeed He was the Son of God, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered, and being consummated, He became, to all who obey Him, the cause of eternal salvation, called by God a High Priest according to the order of Melchisedech."⁸

He tells them that he has much to say on this subject, but they are unfit to hear it, "whereas for the time you ought to be masters, you have need to be taught again what are the first elements of the Word of God," and before he enters on this, the doctrinal part of the Epistle, he gives them another strong warning: "This we will do if God permit." But he is afraid of them. "For it is impossible for those who were once illuminated, have tasted also of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, have moreover tasted the good Word of God, and the power of the world to come, and are fallen away, to be renewed again unto penance, crucifying again to themselves the Son of God and making Him a mockery. For the earth that drinketh

⁷ Heb. iv. 11—13.

⁸ Heb. v. 7—10.

in the rain which cometh often upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is tilled, receiveth blessing from God, but that which bringeth forth thorns and briars is reprobate, and very near unto a curse, whose end is to be burned.”⁹

It will easily be imagined how far the evil must have gone in this Jewish Church for St. Paul to speak thus. He seems at once, indeed, to recall his words, but he does this rather on account of the mercy of God than of their stability. “But, my dearly beloved, we think better things of you, and nearer to salvation, though we speak thus. God is not unjust, that He should forget your work and the love which you have shown in His Name, you who have ministered and do minister to the Saints.”¹⁰ But then, after a time, he returns to the same topic. “If we sin wilfully after having had the knowledge of the truth, there is now left no sacrifice for sin, but a certain dreadful expectation of judgment, and the rage of a fire which shall consume the adversaries. A man making void the Law of Moses, dieth without mercy under two or three witnesses, how much more do you think he deserveth worse punishment who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath esteemed the blood of the testament unclean, by which he was sanctified, and hath offered an affront to the Spirit of grace? . . . It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”¹¹ Then he bids them call to mind the former days, “wherein, being illumined, you endured a great fight of afflictions, and on the one hand, indeed, by reproaches and tribulations were made a gazing-stock, and on the other, were made companions of

⁹ Heb. vi. 4—8. ¹⁰ Heb. vi. 9—10. ¹¹ Heb. x. 26—31.

those that were in such sort. For you both had compassion on those that were in bands, and took with joy being stripped of your own goods, knowing that you have a better and a lasting substance. Do not, therefore, lose your confidence, which hath a great reward. For patience is necessary for you, that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise. For yet a little, and a very little while, and He that is to come, will come, and not delay.”¹²

Then follows the glorious outburst about faith, in which St. Paul pours himself out in praise of the long catalogue of saints who have distinguished themselves by this virtue under persecution. At the end of it he takes up the strain of admonition. “Therefore we also having so great a cloud of witnesses over our head, laying aside every weight and sin which surrounds us, let us run by patience to the fight prepared for us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, Who having joy set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame, and now sitteth on the right hand of the throne of God. For think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from enemies against Himself, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds. For you have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.”¹³ Then follows a long passage about the blessing of discipline, chastisement from God as a loving Father. Then he once more takes to exhortation. “Therefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight steps with your feet, that no one, halting, may go out of the way, but rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one shall see God.

¹² Heb. x. 32—37.

¹³ Heb. xii. 1—4.

Looking diligently lest any man be wanting to the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up do hinder, and by it many be defiled. Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one mess sold his first birthright, for you know that afterwards, when he desired to inherit the benediction, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, although with tears he had sought it.”¹⁴ We have next the grand passage about the glories of the Church, and the lessons of God’s judgments. “For you are not come to a mountain which might be touched, and a burning fire,” and the rest, “but ye are come to Mount Sion, and to the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to the company of many thousands of angels, and to the Church of the first-born, who are written in the heavens, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new testament, and to the sprinkling of blood that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that you refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spoke upon earth, much more shall not we, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven. . . . For our God is a consuming fire.”¹⁵

These passages from the Epistle to the Hebrews may seem at first sight to have but little to do with the parable before us. But it has already been pointed out that our Lord was not now speaking of perseverance and importunity in prayer in general, so much as with a particular reference to the state in which the Church should be in times of persecution, continual, and without any appearance of

¹⁴ Heb. xii. 12—17.

¹⁵ Heb. xii. 18—29.

relaxation, and, as it seems highly probable, with a more special reference still to that state of things among the Jewish Christians to whom St. Paul wrote his Epistle, not long before the destruction of Jerusalem. The Epistle was written six or seven years before that destruction, at the end of St. Paul's first imprisonment. It was therefore only a few years after his detention in Cæsarea, during which time it is likely that St. Luke gathered up finally the traditions concerning our Lord's preaching in Judæa, on which we are now occupied. It is very likely also that the Epistle was written soon after the murder of St. James, the Bishop of Jerusalem. This was brought about during a vacancy in the Roman governorship, owing to the death of Festus, and the High Priest, Ananus, took the opportunity of causing St. James and other Christians to be put to death on a charge of blasphemy. They were interrogated directly as to their faith in our Lord. This must have discouraged the Christians greatly, as St. James was universally respected and revered.¹⁶ These considerations give a particular force to the object which he assigns to our Lord's deliverance of the parable, "That we ought always to pray, and not to faint." For it is obvious that even at that time the position of the Christians among the Jews was becoming almost intolerable, and that whenever the latter were not restrained by the dominant power, they were ready to persecute. It is evident also that, if they had succeeded in their revolt, their

¹⁶ It is very likely also that St. Paul refers to the martyrdom of St. James, when he says, "Remember your prelates, who have spoken the word of God to you, the end of whose conversation (*ἀναστροφῆς*) considering, imitate their faith" (Heb. xiii. 7).

first measure would have been a general massacre of all who did not apostatize from the faith of our Lord.

This also illustrates most forcibly the manner in which our Lord enforces the parable. "And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith! And will not God avenge His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He have patience in their regard? I say to you, that He will quickly avenge them. But yet the Son of Man, when He cometh, shall He find, think you, faith on earth?" He has chosen, it is evident, the example of the unjust judge purposely, as a contrast to the loving, tender Father Whom we have in God. The judge cared nothing for the widow, he had no compassion on her sorrows, no pity for her bereavement, no mercy for her destitution and helplessness. But he did care for one thing, he did feel it worth his while to do justice to her cause, because if he did not, he was certain to suffer some annoyance and importunity. In God it is all the reverse. He has the most tender sympathy for the sufferings of His elect. He loves them beyond measure, He has promised that not a hair of their head shall perish. It is His cause that they are maintaining, and He is bound therefore to avenge them. They are not left, therefore, to the ordinary promises about prayer. Our Lord has repeated them more than once, and they are strong enough to encourage the most feeble to perseverance.

The boon in this case is not a common boon. It is a boon the granting of which belongs as much to His faithfulness and to His care over His own work in the world, as to His tenderness and love.

Our Lord had therefore in His mind, as we learn from this last sentence, not merely to add one more to His promises to prayer in general. He had in His mind the long-continued, persevering, and suffering prayer of His Church under persecution, of which the Church in Judæa at the time of St. Luke's visit as companion to St. Paul, and much more, soon after, at the time when the Epistle to the Hebrews was written, was a signal example. Thus He does not speak simply of granting the importunate prayer made by the widow in the parable. Her prayer exactly meets a particular case—it is, "avenge me of my adversary." It is the deliverance of His elect from unjust, intolerable hardship, a hardship which pressed on them day and night, and against which their whole life was a complaint to His justice.

We find the same kind of prayer mentioned in the Apocalypse, as made by the souls of the martyrs. "I saw under the altar the souls of them who were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, How long, O Lord, Holy and True, dost Thou not judge and revenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given to every one of them one, and it was said to them that they should rest for a little time, till their fellow-servants and their brethren who are to be slain, even as they, should be filled up."¹⁷ This prayer of the blessed martyrs must be understood in the sense in which it agrees with the perfect charity of their state. They do not desire the avenging of their blood for the mere chastisement of the sinners, but that the

¹⁷ Apoc. vi. 9—11.

land may be freed from the stain and curse of just blood unjustly shed, and that the persecutors may expiate by temporal punishment the guilt which they have contracted. In the prayer of the saints under persecution is contained the deliverance of the Church from the peril of the souls of her children which is involved in the persecution, and the ability to teach and preach without restraint the saving truths of the Gospel. We do not always understand the blessing which we daily pray for in the Holy Mass, *Diesque nostros in tua pace disponas*, which was added by St. Gregory in days when there seemed to be no peace for the Church in the world. And how great is the danger to souls, as well as the hindrance to the onward progress of the Church, in days of persecution, we may learn sufficiently by reminding ourselves of the state of things revealed to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews. They were indeed signally a Church under persecution. The great chastisement merited by our Lord's murder was about to fall on the nation, which became even more divided by internal dissension as the time drew on. But whatever were the internal dissensions of the Jews, they agreed well enough in one thing, that is, in the desire to exterminate the Church. Those Christians, too, were to a certain extent cut off from the assistance which their common faith with the Gentile Churches might have secured them. They were left in some measure to themselves in the midst of their hostile fellow-countrymen, and the hatred against the faithful, which was to some extent broken throughout the Greek and Roman world, fell on them without any alleviation. In the pagan world the converts were

treated as fools, or at the worst as seditious : among the Jews they were looked on as renegades and apostates. Whenever the Jewish authorities dared, and they had more licence given them in religious matters than was usual elsewhere, they used all their power for persecution.

The consideration that the state of the Christian Church in Judæa at the time of its great trial may have been present to the mind of our Lord when He uttered the sad words of foreboding which St. Luke has recorded, "But yet the Son of Man when He cometh, shall He find, think you, faith upon earth ?" is some confirmation of an opinion which has advocates among good theologians as to the meaning of these words themselves. It is thought that the subject immediately before Him, as the coming of the Son of Man, was the next great judgment which was to come about in the Providence of God, the destruction of the Jewish polity and Temple. That this is frequently meant by the coming of the Son of Man cannot be denied. When, for instance, our Lord tells the Apostles that they "should not finish the cities of Israel till the Son of Man came,"¹⁸ it is clear that there can be no other meaning to the words so direct as this. When He said of St. John in answer to St. Peter's inquiry, "So I will have him remain till I come, what is it to thee?" it seems most likely that He speaks of the survival of St. John till after the destruction of Jerusalem. In this way some theologians interpret the text before us as if our Lord had meant to say, with reference to the Church in Palestine at the time of this great visitation, that there should be found but a com-

¹⁸ St. Matt. x. 23.

paratively poor amount of faith. The words do not mean necessarily that there shall be no faith at all. They express the foreboding that there will be a great disappointment, so to speak, with regard to the amount and kind of faith which shall be found in the days spoken of. It is the language used by one who finds but a small return for all his labour, and counts it so small as to be almost nothing. In that case the second clause of the sentence would have to be understood as if our Lord had said, "Shall He find faith in the land?" That is, the land of which He is speaking. He has given the parable, we have reason for thinking, with an especial reference to the state of things in Judæa at that time. He has promised that He will avenge the saints speedily, and then He adds that the courage and endurance and perseverance of the faithful will have failed in great measure before that time.

We know that the days of adversity were shortened for the sake of the elect. The Jewish revolt was precipitated by what seems to us an accident. It appears that the Governor, Florus, was determined to drive the Jews into revolt, but that the party of peace might have prevailed—indeed, was on the point of prevailing—and in that case the continuance of the Jewish polity might have been secured, humanly speaking, indefinitely. The nation might have been chastised and humiliated, but it could not have been the policy of Rome to exterminate it. But the Roman army, when on the point of victory, was suddenly withdrawn by the timidity of Cestus Gallus, and the losses which were inflicted on it in its retreat gave a final victory

to the party of disorder, and sealed the doom of Jerusalem. The whole nation became involved in the revolt, and Rome had nothing to do but to act on her maxim of showing no mercy to the rebellious. The destruction of the city was not desired by the conquerors, but they had no choice left them, or rather, the mighty Providence of God so ruled the circumstances of the time as to leave her no choice. The retreat of Gallus was followed at the interval of a few months by the invasion of Vespasian, before which the Christians, mindful of our Lord's warning, had retired to Pella.

It is very likely indeed that this may be the true meaning of our Lord's words. But they have been otherwise interpreted by a great number of Christian writers, and it is therefore better not to insist on this interpretation. The destruction of Jerusalem has long passed out of the consideration of the Latin Church, and it is difficult to put ourselves back into the attitude which was so natural to those who lived when St. Luke wrote, and when our Lord uttered these words. Moreover, the state of the Church during the last days of Judaism was not altogether singular and unparalleled, and the words that were true of that coming of the Son of Man would in any case be likely to find their fulfilment in later ages, and especially as the time of the Last Judgment draws on. We have the promise that the Catholic Church is not to fail, in the sense in which it would fail if the faith were entirely blotted out from the face of the earth. But that promise is not inconsistent with a very great defection at the end of the world under the persecution of Antichrist. St. John told the Christians of his time that even

then there were many Antichrists. Nor does the past history of the Church justify us in believing that, though the gates of Hell are never to prevail against her, there shall be always in her children that amount of living and active faith which is required to ensure her that triumph which would be abundantly secured to her, if the graces with which she is stored were allowed to work up to their full power. So it is easy to believe that these words are to have their fulfilment as a prophecy of what shall be in the last days, when the Son of Man shall come to judge the world, and when Hell shall seem to be at last almost triumphant over the Catholic Church.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

St. Luke xviii. 9—14; *Story of the Gospels*, § 123.

ST. LUKE now subjoins another parable, to which also, as to the last, he prefixes the particular intention with which our Lord delivered it. “And to some who trusted in themselves and despised others, He spoke also this parable.” It does not seem that he means us to understand that our Lord addressed the persons who are described as trusting in themselves and despising others. The parable was aimed at them, and was concerning them, and without the opening remark of the Evangelist we might be ignorant of this. But it need not be thought that the disciples, to whom the discourse seems to have been delivered, were so to be characterized, although there may have been some among our Lord’s followers to whom the description would apply. And indeed, there is never a time when warnings such as that contained in the parable, and in our Lord’s words at the end, can be inopportune. It is probable, moreover, that this is a real story. There is nothing in the circumstances of the time to make it improbable, and the final words, “I say to you, this man went down to his house justified

rather than the other," seems to come from Him as the Judge of all, the Reader of the secrets of hearts, and this makes it more likely that it was a real incident.

"And to some [or about some] who trusted in themselves as just, and despised others, He spoke also this parable. Two men went up into the Temple to pray, the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee standing prayed thus within himself, God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as also is this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes towards Heaven, but struck upon his breast, saying, O God, be merciful to me a sinner. I say to you, this man went down into his house justified rather than the other, because every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted."

The Greek text suggests a few explanations which may make the sense more plain. The Pharisee is said to have stood, and prayed with himself. But it appears rather that it should be said that he stood by himself, and prayed. Standing was the customary attitude of prayer, and what was remarkable about his action was that he took a place of his own, probably a conspicuous place, but certainly a place apart from the rest of the worshippers. Again the words, "I give tithes of all that I possess," might give the idea of an offering of a tenth part of his property, whereas the words mean "all that I acquire," that is a tithe of his income. Another thing that is better for some explanation is that the words which are

rendered "God, be merciful to me a sinner," are more properly "God, be propitiated to me the sinner." The word "be propitiated" is the ritual and sacrificial word, and implies atonement by virtue of a sacrifice, and the word sinner has before it the definite article. Thus we are reminded that the hours of prayer in the Temple were the hours at which sacrifice or incense was offered, which to devout Jews would be a pleading for propitiation by virtue of the great Sacrifice of our Lord.

We have now to examine the prayer of the Pharisee, and see what it contains that justifies our Lord's condemnation of it. Our Lord does not condemn it altogether, or indeed absolutely, but He gives us to understand that it did not contribute in anything to the justification of him who made it. What He says against it is that it was the prayer of a man who exalted himself, and He makes its inefficiency consist in that. But we may be sure that He could have pointed out many positive defects besides the want of that contrition, humility, and reverence, which would have given it a justifying power. It is hardly necessary to say, in the first place, that there was no fault in the Pharisee because he fasted twice in the week, or gave tithes of all that accrued to him. These were good works, and the Pharisee is not to be supposed to have attributed them to himself falsely. And if they were good works there would be no harm in thanking God for them, as all good comes from Him and is the fruit of His grace, if there is real gratitude to Him and if they are not attributed to ourselves. Salmeron tells us that it was "here that the Pharisee went

astray, and that his words show that he attributed his good works to something specially good in himself, by which he was better than other men, as the reward of his own merits in a peculiar and singular way." And in truth, it may be questioned whether any one who was alive to his own entire dependence on God, his own nothingness as a creature, his own tendency to spoil everything that he received from God, his own capacity of sinning more viciously than the worst of sinners, would have indulged in his contemptuous description of others as extortioners, unjust, adulterers, and much more in his evil judgment of the poor publican before him.

There are also other defects to be noted in his prayer. He does not ask for pardon for the sins of which he has been guilty, for he knows of none. He does not acknowledge that he may have many unknown sins, or have given scandal to others. The saints of God are fond of imputing the sins of others to themselves, but there is nothing of that here. He does not ask for any continuance of grace to prevent him from falling for the future, indeed, he makes no prayer at all for grace, as one who has no need of it, nor of any increase of enlightenment or of virtue, for he does not think himself capable of improvement. The sins of others are not warnings to him, they only increase his self-satisfaction. He does not even compassionate them. And he passes a severe and unwarranted condemnation upon the publican, whose conscience he could not have known. These are grave faults at any time and in any place. But they were committed by him as he stood praying in the house of God, where

he should have been full of reverence, humility, self-abasement, and above all, of charity.

"And the publican standing afar off, would not so much as lift his eyes unto Heaven, but struck his breast, saying, O God, be propitiated to me the sinner." It takes few words to describe the conduct and prayer of the publican, but each word is expressive. He stands afar off, as unworthy to draw nearer than was necessary to place him within the sacred precincts. He keeps his eyes fixed on the ground, as having no right to the Heaven which he had forfeited, and being an unfit object for the eyes of the dwellers there. He strikes his breast in contrition, and self-abasement, and self-chastisement, and his prayer is simply that God will accept some satisfaction for the many sins of which he feels guilty, and which give him a right to be called "the sinner." He makes no excuse, but he has confidence, for without that he would not have made his prayer, but his confidence is in the mercy of God, not in any merits of his own. And our Lord sufficiently explains the issue of his prayer, when He says, that the publican went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee, for it is the way of God to exalt the humble and abase the proud. This is the one difference on which the whole parable turns. The virtues of the Pharisee may have been true in their way, but they were united with pride, and therefore he gained nothing with God by his prayer. The sins of the publican may have been many and great, but they were accompanied with self-abasement and humiliation, and therefore his prayer for pardon was heard. And the reason lies in the character of God. All creatures are as nothing

before Him, and to Him belongs the glory of all that they are and all that they do. He cannot bear the lie which is contained in self-exaltation, in the attributing to ourselves of anything good or great. That is a falsehood which appropriates to ourselves what is His gift, and at the same time that it thus provokes His anger, it also shuts the door against any further mercies or gifts from Him, because those also will be made matter of a false exaltation. So it is an invariable rule of His Providence to exalt the humble, because they give the glory to Him, and to abase the proud, because they attribute His glory to themselves.¹

The learned Salmeron, who is as devout as he is learned, subjoins to his remarks on this parable of our Lord certain rules with regard to the subject-matter of pride and humility which he recommends for general use. In the first place, it is useful and laudable never to trust in any good works which we have done by the grace of God, first because they are not certainly good by any undoubted test, then because they are not purely good, but with many stains and imperfections, then because our justice is not stable and certain to last, and lastly, because it has not yet been judged, as St. Paul says of himself. There are some occasions on which we may manifest them, and they may add a security to our conscience in times of trial, but that is all.

¹ This was recognized by the heathen moralists, one of whom records a saying of Æsop's, who was asked what God was doing? and answered that He was lowering the lofty and exalting the lowly (Diog. Laertius, Chilo i. 69; see Greswell on the Parables, iv. 278).

His second rule is that we are always bound to give thanks to God, not only with our lips, but in our heart. But then we must consider that we have nothing good of our own, no graces, no merit, and we are not to put forward what we have received, we are to beg pardon for our hidden sins, we are never to put ourselves before another either in thought or word, and we are to beg of God to preserve what He has given us, as we ourselves are like the prodigal son, and predisposed to waste all our substance.

The third rule is never to judge another as a hopeless sinner, nor prefer ourselves to him, which is to usurp the judgment of God. No one is a good judge in his own cause, and our self-love makes us judge our own faults to be light and those of others to be heavy, while the envy and aversion with which we regard them makes our own faults very great. No sin that one man has committed is impossible to another.

The fourth rule regards the actions of our neighbour. When he has done what is certainly good, we are to think it better than it seems, and when he has done what is bad, we are to think it less so. We are to hold his doubtful good deeds as certain, and his doubtful evil deeds as not at all such. We are to think just the contrary concerning ourselves. Our certain good deeds are to be held as less good, our certain evil deeds as greater, our doubtful evil deeds as certain, our doubtful good deeds as not good at all.

The fifth rule is that no one must consider himself great in God's sight because of his good works, because that again belongs to the judgment

of God. A good conscience is a great boon, but there may be things which escape our conscience, and thus every one may hold himself a sinner. There may be many sins of omission, and, in order that we may hunger and thirst after justice, God wills that we should thus esteem ourselves.

The sixth rule is that with regard to our cooperation with God, He wills that we should do all things as if the whole depended on ourselves, and should also acknowledge that we can do nothing at all without His grace. Lastly, he says that people who sometimes praise themselves and speak of their own virtues are not to be set down at once as worthy of reproach or condemnation. For there are some who may do this, acknowledging all the time that the whole merit is from God, in order to praise Him, or for the salvation of their neighbour, or to raise up the hope of others in God, and they do this with great gratitude and profound humility, and, as St. Gregory says, "Those things are not proud in the ears of God which are uttered with a humble heart."

It is easy to test by these rules the language of the Pharisee in the parable. It is easy also to learn a lesson from this blessed publican, whom we delight to think of as a real person, who is among those mentioned in the Gospels who has taught us a precious lesson as to prayer in the few words he has uttered. He takes his place by the side of the centurion, who said, "Lord, I am not worthy," or the leper, who said, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst heal me," or the Syrophœnician mother, who said, "Yea, Lord, but the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the master's table." There

are times when we can hardly find words to express our thoughts and feelings in prayer. At such times and not at such times only, what better can we do than put ourselves in the position of the publican, and simply beat our breasts and say, "God, be propitiated to me the sinner"?

BOOK III.

- CHAP. I.—The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard.
,, II.—The Parable of the Lord and his Servants.
,, III.—The Parable of the Two Sons.
,, IV.—The Parable of the Husbandmen.
,, V.—The Parable of the Wedding of the King's Son.
,, VI.—The Parable of the Ten Virgins.
,, VII.—The Parables of the Talents and the Sheep and
the Goats.

CHAPTER I.

THE PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

St. Matt. xix. 30, xx. 1—16; St. Mark x. 31; *Story of the Gospels*, § 127.

[THE last seven parables of our Blessed Lord have some characteristic features, as to which very few words need be here said by way of introduction. We should naturally expect that all His teaching, whether to the Apostles and His other disciples, or to the people in general, or to the priests His enemies, would now reflect in some measure the solemn and awful colouring of the events which were now so close at hand. We should expect to find here an earnestness as of One Who feels His time short, a fearlessness in warning and in setting forth startling truths, which are not so conspicuous in His manner at earlier periods of the history. It must also be borne in mind that towards the later stages of His Ministry our Lord had begun to lay down laws and rules and guiding principles for the new society which He was founding, which had been kept back in the earlier teaching. We have already had some specimen of this class of teaching in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, in that of the Good Samaritan, and one or two others. Such parables have been called by some writers “Parables of the Kingdom.”]

It is to this last-named class that the great Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard belongs. The readers of the *Public Life of our Lord* will be aware that it belongs to the period of His Teaching during which He spoke particularly of what are called the Counsels of Perfection, and the parable can be most easily understood when this is kept in mind.

Other parables of this time have the characteristic of being distinctly and avowedly prophetic, either of what was immediately to happen to His own Sacred Person at the hands of the Jews, or in a few years from that time as to the city of Jerusalem and the whole nation, or at the more remote "coming" of our Lord at the end of the world. The Parable of the Lord and his Servants seems to be purposely put in a form which would recall to the hearers public incidents with which they were familiar, though the truth it sets forth is general and belongs to all time. The Parable of the Two Sons, in like manner, is being continually verified, though it refers primarily to the conduct of the priests and the common people respectively. The other parables of this time are distinctly prophetic, not merely as laying down general principles of "the Kingdom," but as announcing pointedly that, at the time to which they refer, these principles were to be most plainly exemplified or carried out in the justice of God.]

The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard is one of the parables which has given the greatest trouble to expositors, though it is fair to add that the difficulty is to some extent created by their

own forgetfulness of the fact that it is an explanation of former words of our Lord. If it had always been remembered that the true way of reading it is that which is put before us by St. Matthew, "And many that are first, shall be last, and the last first," or, as the Greek stands, "There shall be many first last, and last first, for the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a householder," and the rest, a great many of the explanations which have been offered would have been seen at once to have nothing to do with the lesson which our Lord meant to convey. It would also have been seen, from the change in the tense, that our Lord is here speaking of a general law of the Kingdom which has its fulfilment in many cases, and will be especially fulfilled at the time of which He is speaking.

"For the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a householder, who went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard." That is, the action and conduct of God in regard to the Kingdom of Heaven is like that of the householder, as the parable proceeds to explain. *"And having agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour, he saw others standing in the market-place idle. And he said to them, Go you also into my vineyard, and I will give you what shall be just. And again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did in like manner. But about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing, and he saith to them, Why stand you here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith to them, Go ye also into my vineyard. And when evening was come the lord of the vineyard said to his steward, Call the labourers and*

pay them their hire, beginning from the last even to the first. When, therefore, they were come that came about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first also came, they thought that they should receive more, and they also received every man a penny. And receiving it, they murmured against the master of the house, saying, These last have worked but one hour, and thou hast made them equal to us, that have borne the burthen of the day and the heats. But he answering said to one of them, Friend, I do thee no wrong—didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take what is thine, and go thy way, I will also give to this last even as to thee. Is it not lawful for me to do as I like? is thy eye evil, because I am good?"

And then our Lord subjoins once more the truth for the sake of which the parable is set forth. "So shall the first be last, and the last first. For many are called, but few are chosen." It is clear, therefore, that He Himself has supplied, if we are able to catch His meaning, the interpretation of the parable. "The first shall be last, and the last first," in the way in which that parable explains. He had been speaking of those who had made or should make great earthly sacrifices for His sake. Among these, in respect of the reward, there shall be many that are first that shall be last, and last that shall be first. How this is, is explained in the parable. Those who were first there became last. Why? It seems, on account of their behaviour with regard to those who were last admitted to the vineyard. Their conduct contains the reason why those who might otherwise have remained first became last. And those who were last became first, because the householder in his munificence chose to give them the

same remuneration which he had originally bargained to give to the others. The first, then, became last by their own perversity, the last became first by the munificence of the householder. The evil eye was the ruin of the first, the goodness of the lord was the welfare of the last. And this is our Lord's own explanation, and it is delivered to those to whom He has just made the promise of the hundred-fold in this life with persecutions. In that promise He adds the warning, that there are many who shall be, so to say, "first, last, and last, first," and He adds to the warning the parable explaining how this is to be.

There are here two sets of "labourers," whose cases are contrasted, and each case should be considered separately. Our Lord first speaks of the first that become last, and then of the last that are made first. In the parable, it is the action of the householder, in putting the last on an equality with the first, that occasions the evil eye in the earliest labourers, in consequence of which they are put in the last place. The liberality of the householder comes before, and even is the occasion of, the churlishness of those who were first called. It is clear, however, that our Lord does not dwell so much on the case of the last who became first, as on that of the first who became last, and the more pointed teaching of the parable refers to the case of these rather than of the others.

If we turn to the promise of the great rewards, here and hereafter, of which promise this saying of our Lord is a kind of qualification, we can see that, without the explanation supplied by the parable, it might perhaps have been misunderstood. Our Lord had said that there was to be a most liberal compen-

sation for any sacrifices which had been made for Him, and that besides a hundred-fold in this life, they were to purchase everlasting life in the future. This would bring before His mind some other great truths concerning the rewards in His Kingdom which it was very useful to put forward, and which to some extent qualify the other of the extreme munificence with which all services are rewarded therein. In the first place would occur that great principle of the freedom of God in dispensing His choicest gifts, which was about to be illustrated, soon after the institution of the Church, in the most signal manner, and to the surprise and even scandal of many who had seemed hitherto to be first. The Jews seemed to be first in comparison with the Gentiles. This opinion was to receive a great shock almost immediately. The earliest converts to the Church seemed to be first in comparison with the later converts. The Apostles seemed to be great as compared with the other disciples. The same was to hold good in numberless other instances. The clergy seemed to be before the laity, the religious before secular persons. In all these cases, there are certain persons placed in a kind of external and visible superiority over others, as having great advantages given them in the Kingdom of God. They might be considered as the "first comers" among the labourers, and on that account to have certain rights of their own in the Kingdom. It might be a fatal error, in the first place, if they come to consider these rights as inalienable.

Our Lord had been speaking of the Apostles first, as having left all and followed Him. He had promised them that they should sit on twelve thrones

judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Then, continuing to refer to that act of perfect renunciation of everything for His sake, He extended the promise of a great reward to all who had done the like, as we have seen. This was the recompence which St. Peter asked about, and it is natural to think that those who had made it are meant to answer, each in his degree, to the earlier comers in the parable. It was an act of renunciation which was thus to be rewarded, under the same conditions, as we may well understand, as those under which all rewards in God's Kingdom are distributed. Now there is no act of sacrifice for God which can ensure final perseverance, which lives on by any infallible law in the soul that makes it. Life everlasting, which is also promised to those who leave all, is not promised infallibly. The condition is taken for granted, that the good disposition remains; and that the act has not been virtually recalled by an act of sin. This was a qualification which it was natural should be made, though perhaps the Apostles would understand sufficiently the truth without any formal warning concerning it. And one among the Apostles themselves was to have no part in the reward. He was to have no throne, he was to have no hundred-fold reward for all he had left. The word "but" with which St. Mark introduces the last clause of our Lord's declaration, sufficiently fixes its application to those to whom that great declaration was made. It was not merely that generally speaking no part or act of ours can ensure of itself our continuance in the state to which such great things are promised. Our Lord's words are a prophecy, as well as a rule. There shall be last first, and first last.

But beyond the general law which makes all these great promises conditional on the perseverance of those to whom they are made, there is another rule of the Divine action which requires to be known in order to understand the matter perfectly. The doctrine declared by our Lord in the context before us amounts to a statement of the different "vocations," as we call them, which were to be in the Christian Church. We have had to consider the elevation of marriage to a new dignity by our Lord, and, at the same time, the superior dignity of the virgin state. We have had before us the vocation to a state of Apostolical poverty, in the case of the rich young man. The introduction of the question of St. Peter sets before us the whole ecclesiastical state, from the highest position in the hierarchy to the lowest. Some are called to govern and judge in the Church, others to be subjects and to obey. Our Lord does not mention distinctly the religious state, but the opinion that the Apostles were already religious under vows has many supporters. And in any case the vocations already distinctly mentioned may be considered as bringing before the mind, as has been said, the whole system of the beautiful variety of vocations. In them some are higher, some are lower, all are beautiful, and all are the gift of God.

But there was something more to be said about these vocations. The rewards of the eternal life are not to be secured thereby by any fixed and hard rule, as if, for instance, all religious persons were to be higher than all secular persons, or all ecclesiastical before all laymen. The rewards of the eternal kingdom are distributed in proportion to the sanctity of

those who are to be rewarded. The vocations of which we are cognizant on earth are means to sanctity, they are not sanctity itself. One of the great Saints of the desert once desired to know his state before God, and he was made to know that he was equal to a poor artisan of Alexandria. The religious habit, the hierarchical mitre, do not raise of necessity those who wear them above the layman, the soldier, the merchant, or the labourer, who may win higher rewards in Heaven by faithfulness in their vocation and by charity. Charity, held until the end and in the highest degree, is the one thing which will receive the highest reward, and by the mercy of God, charity is possible in the workshop and in the market-place, as well as in the episcopal chair or in the cell of the recluse. In this way there shall be first last and last first. Charity is the gift of God, and He may, if He chooses, give mighty graces in this way to those who seem externally the last in the Kingdom, and He may also give the grace of a very rapid increase in charity to those who come in late in the day to His service.

It is not, therefore, without significance that our Lord has made the fall of the first comers turn upon a fault in this respect. It may be that high vocations may be forfeited for any sin, as, for instance, it is thought that the ruin of Judas was brought about by his covetousness. But the state of soul in which Judas found himself, as to charity, is sufficiently evinced by his remarks upon the lavish magnificence of Magdalene in anointing our Lord. Charity, at all events, is banished from the sinful soul in whatever vocation it may have been placed, and want of charity is most often the ruin of those who can

stand firm against the temptations to the lower vices. That is, when such persons fall, it is usually thus. So our Lord paints these the first comers as led astray by want of charity. Was their reward the less, because the others received an equal recompence? But they were angry at their being placed on an equality with themselves. This was enough to make them unfit for the favour of the great householder. And our Lord puts his reply on the ground of his freedom to do as he likes, though there might have been other grounds alleged. For those who came in at the eleventh hour came late for no fault of their own. If they had been there at the earlier time, they might have come in with the first, but "no man hired them." Perhaps we are meant to learn that God will have no one question His right to confer favours on whom He pleases. He is just to all, but He may, if He chooses, be larger in His gifts in one case than in another. But the evil eye He cannot abide. For the evil eye is inconsistent with charity. To such as those He will give no answer, no explanation, He will not reason with them as if there was anything to explain. In the action of God which is sketched in this parable there is perfect justice, as well as the exercise of the absolute freedom of God. For, as has been said, it is charity alone which secures the reward of glory, and this charity may be found everywhere.

A large number of the interpreters of this parable consider that it is to be understood primarily of the rejection of the Jews and the admission of the Gentiles to the Kingdom. There is no objection to this interpretation, if the parable is considered as prophetic. In fact, the act of God in His dealings

with the Jews and with the Gentiles is an instance of the law which the parable illustrates, and an instance which must have been much on our Lord's mind at this time. Moreover, all the parables of this period have more or less a reference to the coming transfer of the gifts of God from the Jews to the Gentiles. It was the change for which our Lord was evidently anxious that the minds of the disciples should be prepared. They would be prepared for it by any parable which set forth the law of God's action of which we speak. And it is well to remember that nations and communities are the objects of God's special favour as well as single persons, and that, as He first chose the Jews out of His pure love, and then rejected them on account of their opposition to the admission of the Gentiles into the Church, so He still continues from time to time dealing with families and with nations, preserving them in unity and the true faith when others fall away, and again withdrawing from them His favours and graces, and even the gift of faith, when He sees them disloyal to the law of charity. This is the great trial of those who have been injured by others for the sake of religion, or of the law of God. They may maintain their faith and their virtue, but they are required to do more. They are required to forgive their injurers from their heart, on pain of forfeiting their own crown. In this way the first are made last, and the last first. The great instance of course is that which has been mentioned, the case of the Jews. "Thou hast made them equal to us, who have borne the burthen of the day and the heats," are words which might well have been used by some of those whom St. Paul had to remind

"that God was the God of the Gentiles as well as the God of the Jews." But the operation of that law of God's Kingdom, which fell so severely on the envious Jews, is not confined to the early ages of the Church, and it rules His dealings with individual souls as well as with once favoured nations, wherever there is a temptation against charity which is not faithfully resisted.

And our Lord may well also have had before His mind the rise in the Church, within a few years from the time when He was speaking, of that great and chosen servant of His, the vessel of election, who was then altogether outside the numbers of His followers, and was soon to become the great persecutor of those who bore His name. St. Paul was nevertheless to become the Apostle of the whole world, to labour, in one sense, more abundantly than all, and to take his place among the chosen band by the side of St. Peter himself. And if the Blessed Twelve needed any lesson to teach them how to treat St. Paul, as soon as they became aware of his vocation to the Apostolate, which he received at the same time as his conversion, they would have been supplied with that instruction when they remembered this parable and the words with which it concludes. And St. Paul himself can teach us how true it is that even the highest vocations in the Church are not safe, if there is a lack of charity. Let us listen to him for awhile, as he speaks to the Corinthian Church.

"God indeed hath set some in the Church, first Apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly doctors, after that, miracles, then the graces of healings, helps, governments, kinds of tongues, interpretations of

speeches." He enumerates the orders of men who are conspicuous in the visible Church for their spiritual gifts. He goes on, "Are all Apostles? are all prophets? are all doctors? are all workers of miracles? Have all the grace of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" He means that these gifts are distributed according to the free choice of God, and he adds that it is well to desire to have higher and higher gifts for His service. "And yet," he subjoins, "I show you a yet more excellent way. If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have all prophecy, and should have all mysteries, and all knowledge, and should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." Here is a distinct reference to the Gospel history, which reports our Lord's words about faith moving mountains.

He proceeds to speak of some of those services to God which belong to the class of which our Lord speaks in the passage before the parable, and of which passage it is an explanation. "And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor," as was proposed to the rich young man by our Lord, "and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Then follows here the well-known passage in which charity is described, of which we shall have to speak presently. All those sacrifices which can be made to God in various vocations are temporary, they belong to this life, and end with this life, as also the preternatural gifts, the *gratiæ gratis datæ*, which will vanish before that which is perfect in Heaven. But charity

is the same in the next world as in this. "Charity never falleth away, whether prophecies shall be made void, or tongues shall cease, or knowledge shall be destroyed. For we know" here below "in part, and we prophecy in part" according to the needs of the Church in our day. "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, when I became a man I put away the things of a child. We see now through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know, even as I am known."¹

This would not be the place for a full exposition of this passage, and the context from which it is taken. A few considerations will be enough to explain how it illustrates the parable before us. First, it is clear that St. Paul intends most gently to warn the Corinthians against a fault which is not very unlike that "evil eye" of which our Lord here speaks. The Corinthian Church was one in which there were a great many jealousies and rivalries. The very richness of the spiritual gifts, of the order of *gratiæ gratis dataæ*, which were imparted to some among the community, was a cause of ambition and invidious comparison. The Epistle begins in a way that touches the evil in a most delicate way, which has something almost of irony about it. St. Paul gives thanks for the grace given them, "that in all things you are made rich in all utterance and in all knowledge," and the like, and then immediately passes to the necessity of mutual union and charity. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 28—31; xiii. 1—12.

Lord Jesus Christ that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms among you. . . . For it hath been signified unto me, my brethren, of you . . . that there are contentions among you." It is as if he had said, "I am indeed glad to hear of your abounding in the gifts of spiritual intelligence. That is all very well—but how is it that there are contentions among you?"

We need not dwell on the dexterous manner in which St. Paul deals with this subject-matter, speaking as if the contentions had been between the partisans of himself and Apollo. "But these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollo, for your sakes." The Epistle then proceeds with various subjects, which had been matters of inquiry addressed to St. Paul, or on which he animadverts. At length, in the twelfth chapter, he comes to the question of "spiritual gifts," and speaks of their variety and order. What it is important for us to observe is, that all through there runs the strain of warning against the danger of uncharity among the possessors of these gifts. It is here that he draws out his great comparison of the Church to the human body. This is entirely St. Paul's, although it may have been suggested by the language of our Lord about the Vine and its branches. The point to be noticed is that, in his treatment of the subject before him, St. Paul seems to insist on the matter of charity far more than he need, unless he had seen some great danger among the Corinthians from the absence of this virtue. And, if the danger had been peculiar to that Church or that day, and not of universal importance, we perhaps should not have had it in

an Epistle preserved to us as a part of the Sacred Scriptures.

It is to be noted also that St. Paul does not so much insist on the supremacy of charity among the virtues, as upon the utter worthlessness of all others without it. If he speak with tongues of men and angels, and has not charity, he is not only poorly furnished, he is as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Prophecy, the knowledge of mysteries, the faith that can move mountains—with all these, if he has not charity, he is nothing. It profits him absolutely nothing, without charity, to have given his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned. And when he comes to describe charity, we can see what he is afraid of among those to whom he writes by the qualities which he names as contrary to this virtue. It is patient and kind, he says, but he soon passes to what it is not. It is not envious, it dealeth not perversely, it is not puffed up, it is not ambitious, it seeketh not its own, it is not provoked to anger, it thinketh no evil, it does not rejoice in evil, but rejoiceth with the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. This description of the virtue, chiefly from the negative side, taken together with the manner in which St. Paul pours himself out on the subject, as it seems, superabundantly, before he returns to the direct subject of spiritual gifts—“follow after charity, be zealous for spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy”—shows us that in the mind of the Apostle the thought was prominent of the uselessness of all high vocations without charity, and the way in which the highest services or vocations may be spoilt by the want of charity. But this is just the

point in the parable before us on which we are dwelling. And it is too true, as a matter of experience, that men may serve God very well in a number of manners, and yet, after all, be shipwrecked as to their very salvation from the want of charity. The world is full of temptations against it, which sometimes overcome even those who suffer much and labour much for their faith, as in the story of the Christian priest who was being led to martyrdom, and met some one from whom he thought he had received an injury which he refused to forgive.

One great difficulty of the parable, to most expositors, lies in the statement that all the labourers received the same reward, a "denarius," for their labour, and many ingenious explanations have been devised to meet it. Perhaps, however, the feature which creates the difficulty is necessary for the parable, without having any other meaning. Our Lord, if the interpretation here followed is true, wishes to point out that the rewards in Heaven do not correspond to the height or lowness of the visible vocations on earth. He represents in the parable these visible vocations, or external services, or preternatural gifts of that class which is not necessarily connected with sanctifying grace, under the figure of a series of labourers who go into the vineyard at different times. They all go at once when they are asked, for there is not in this parable any question of refusing the invitation. This is distinctive of this parable, and puts it in a different class from such as that of the Pounds or the Talents or the Great Supper. The difference between the labourers is therefore not in themselves, but in the

call which they receive, which involves, certainly, a different amount of labour, as far as that is measured by what meets the senses. He wishes to teach us, however, that the differences between the various rewards in Heaven, which are measured by the justice of God, lie, not in the external vocation, high or low, late or early, but in the charity with which the service is rendered. How does our Lord bring this about? He makes the householder act in a way which would be contrary to justice, if he was bound to take the length of the hours of labour, and nothing else, as the measure of the reward of the labourer. By this, He makes it natural that the first labourers, who have a false estimate of their dues, complain in a manner which provokes the anger of the householder.

It is thus then that our Lord brings in the element of charity. He does not directly make it, as indeed it is in Heaven, the measure of the reward, but He makes the absence of it the cause of the rejection of those who make the complaint. We are left to infer from this what our Lord wants us to see, that the one thing which makes the first last is this very want of charity. But the conduct of the dissatisfied labourers is the point of importance, and the feature in the story that brings out the temper in them which He speaks of as the "evil eye," is of comparatively little moment. It was necessary for the parable that the first labourers should seem to themselves to have something to complain of, and this is supplied by the feature of the sameness of the reward in all cases, which seems to them unjust. Thus the feature of the equal reward, a penny to all, in the conduct of the house-

holder, is in this parable analogous to the conduct of the dishonest steward or the unjust judge in other parables. We are not meant to find a moral lesson in the dishonesty of the steward or in the hardness of the unjust judge, and here we are not meant to infer that the rewards of Heaven are equal. We should misapprehend the parable about the steward, if we inferred that we were to use our opportunities to make ourselves friends by injustice like his. We are meant to learn to be as clever and thoughtful in using our opportunities as he was. So again we are meant to learn from the Parable of the Widow that God will hear our prayers for the very sake of our perseverance in asking, not that He is in other respects like the unjust judge. So here we are meant by our Lord to learn from this parable that God, Who can do no wrong, will reject us if we complain of His extraordinary bounty to others, instead of rejoicing at it, and much more if we complain of it as an infringement of our own rights from Him, which are none at all. This is the reason why the feature of the equal penny is introduced. Our Lord might have chosen any other incident to show this, but He had chosen that this lesson should be enforced by a great warning against any defect of charity. And this seems the natural conclusion concerning this parable. For however able we may be to show that the same reward in Heaven may be different to different people, that is not the answer which our Lord gives to the complaint. He makes the householder stand on his right to be generous if he pleases. He takes the complaint as it is made, and punishes those who make it. Our Lord does not make him say that the reward of the first labourers

is more to them than the reward of the last to them. No well instructed Christian will suppose that all the rewards in Heaven are equal, and it is therefore natural to conclude that an interpretation which conflicts with what every one knows was not meant by our Lord.

Moreover, He seems to point again to the lesson which He wishes us to learn by the clause which He adds at the end of the parable. "*So* shall the first be last and the last first, for many are called but few are chosen." The word *so* does not merely mean simply that it shall be as He says, but that it shall be as He says in the way which He has been describing. "In this manner it shall come about," He seems to say. The *so* has the same force as in the other Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, where, after relating the chastisement inflicted by the lord who had forgiven him, but afterwards recalled his forgiveness or at least renewed the chastisement which had been due, He says, "So also shall My Heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."² Our Lord, then, tells us "that the first shall be made last, and the last first," in the same way and by the application of the same principle which is applied in the story which He has been relating. The first, then, shall lose their priority, and the last shall gain it, for the same reason that is assigned in the parable. And it would be as much against the sense of the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant to say that we are not to be punished, specifically, for unforgiveness, as it would be against our Lord's words in this parable to say that the first do not

² St. Matt. xviii. 35.

lose their priority because of their want of charity to their neighbours, which even leads them to murmur against God.

Some texts add, "For many are called, but few chosen," or elect, and there is considerable doubt whether the words belong to the passage. According to the interpretation which is here followed, there can be no difficulty in explaining them. The called are many, and the elect are few. No calling whatever, however high, can of itself secure the eternal glory. It may be forfeited, and is forfeited in countless cases. Those who persevere are the elect, few in comparison to the whole number who are called.

CHAPTER II.

THE PARABLE OF THE LORD AND HIS SERVANTS.

St. Luke xix. 11—28; *Story of the Gospels*, § 130.

THE conversion of Zacchæus is the last incident that is recorded by the Evangelists as happening in this journey of our Lord to Bethany. It must have filled the hearts of the disciples with a holy joy, and raised still higher the spirit of triumph which had been fed in many of them by the cure of the two blind men in the presence of the multitude. Our Lord had shown Himself the Master of hearts as well as the Healer of physical infirmities. It might well have been thought that nothing could withstand Him, not even the power of Rome, not even the malignant envy of the priests. He was about to indulge their feeling of devotion by ending this ascent to the Holy City by the procession of the Day of Palms, an occasion on which He was about to assume for a moment the state of a King. This might increase and encourage their devotion, but it would also encourage the delusion which possessed them as to the immediate future. He was desirous of sobering them, and giving them a last warning, which would both moderate their expectations and, at the same time, elevate them to more spiritual views. The discourse in which He did this was

cast in the familiar form of a parable. It may have been delivered immediately after the declaration of Zacchæus.

“And as they were hearing these things, He added and spoke a parable, because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the Kingdom of God should immediately be manifested. He said, therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And calling his ten servants” [or, ten who were his servants] *“he gave them ten pounds, and said to them, Trade till I come. But his citizens hated him, and they sent an embassage after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.”* It could hardly be that the disciples would not understand at once that the nobleman who was to go into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return, was our Lord Himself. The statement at once put an end to their expectations that the Kingdom should be immediately made manifest. This was our Lord’s object, but instead of telling it to them plainly, He wrapped it up in a parable of instruction, the purport of which was to teach them what their duties were to be in the time of their Master’s absence. This lesson is expressed in the bestowal of the ten pounds, which were divided equally among them with the injunction, “Trade till I come.”

We must be careful to remind ourselves here that the circumstances which make up the parable were very familiar to the Jews. Rome was the centre of political power, the place to which the so-called kings of the period must have recourse to obtain their kingdoms. It was the place where crowns and provinces were disposed of. It was

also the place to which subjects or "citizens" of the provinces and tributary princedoms might betake themselves or send embassies, complaining of their governors, obtaining their dismissal, or objecting to their appointment. Thus it had been with Herod, who received his throne by Roman favour. Thus it had been with Archelaus, of whom the Jews complained so successfully that he was not allowed the title of king, and was finally deprived of all power. Our Lord seems to have been willing to use this imagery as representing what was to happen in His own case, unlike indeed as was His Kingdom to that of Herod or Archelaus. He meant them to understand that His Kingdom was not immediately to appear, and He hinted at His own departure before that Kingdom was to be established. He was to say afterwards, that it was expedient for them that He should go. Here He puts the thought into their minds, to be of use to them when the time of trial came. The Jews were to cry out, "We have no king but Cæsar," and instead of saying merely, "We will not have this Man to reign over us," they were to condemn Him to death and clamour with success for His crucifixion, out of a hatred which knew no bounds, and was fanned by all the malice of Hell. He was to leave behind Him His Church, with the commission to bring all nations under its sway, but the world has always been rebellious to it, and is saying, generation after generation, "We will not have Him to reign over us."

All this is outside the purpose of the parable, for our Lord was always careful not to tell them too much at once, but it may have been in the mind of

our Lord as He spoke the words. It was enough for this purpose, as to the advent of the Kingdom, that the disciples should be warned that it was not to appear at present. He was to go away, then, though it was to His Father, and not to the court of Tiberius, it was to Heaven and not to Rome. The important point was that they should occupy themselves aright during the time of His absence. The nobleman gave them each a pound, and bade them employ their time in multiplying it. It was a peaceful employment, quite alien to the thoughts of those who might imagine that the Kingdom was to be obtained by force, or human policy, and the language would take their minds back to other teachings of His about watchfulness, and the service that was to be rendered to God as His due without resting, and the harvest which was to be reaped by those who had not sown it, and their labours as "fishers of men," and the like. They must have seen at once that our Lord was not the Person to give them literally pounds or sums of money, and therefore they would easily seek a deeper meaning in the parable. Our Lord is absent, we have all received from Him whatever grace or good we have, and what is most important of all, we have to give an account to Him on His return. Instead of the partisans of a triumphant Lord Who is immediately to enter into His Kingdom and distribute its prizes to His followers, we are here simply to do the work of our Lord, and to render Him an account of it.

"And it came to pass, that he returned, having received the kingdom, and he commanded his servants to be called, to whom he had given the money, that he might know

how much every man had gained by trading." It seems as if the great object in the absence of the king had not been the acquisition of the sovereignty so much as the trial of his servants. The first thing that he does, in the parable, is to call them to an account. Thus the trafficking for our Lord's interest is put before us as the one thing which is to occupy our thoughts. We leave the acquisition of the Kingdom to Him, we have only to do our part as faithful servants in working in the Kingdom. "*And the first came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said to him, Well done, thou good servant, because thou hast been faithful in a little, thou shalt have power over ten cities. And the second came saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said to him, Be thou also over five cities.*"

The truth set before us here is two-fold. In the first place, the same graces may be so used by different persons, as to fructify in one case more, and in another less. Grace has within it a marvellous power of increase, but even when well used, it may have been better used, and this depends in great measure on our own cooperation with it, though in the end we must attribute all to God, and say, Lord, Thy pound hath gained ten or five pounds. And God in His turn will give the praise that is due to each, as St. Paul teaches. The Lord says, "*Well done, good servant.*" In the second place, the reward is in degree, not in kind, corresponding to the labour, for he who gains ten pounds receives not a return in wealth but power, "*Thou shalt have power over ten cities.*" This feature meets us more than once in our Lord's description of the heavenly rewards, and we cannot doubt that He means that

we should understand thereby that the saints in Heaven are rewarded by a share of their King's power as well as by the most perfect bliss. For the highest bliss must be to aid in their own way in promoting the interest of our Lord, and thus to share His triumph. It is true that this feature is contained in the general idea of the parable, which speaks of the Kingdom. What our Lord wished to correct in His followers was the false idea that the Kingdom was immediately to appear. But the idea of the disciples that our Lord was a King, was true, and not false, and it is in keeping with this that He distributes to His faithful friends authority as well as happiness.

“And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin. For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man, thou takest up what thou didst not lay down, and thou reapest that which thou didst not sow. He said to him, Out of thy own mouth I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up what I laid not down, and reaping that which I did not sow. And why then didst thou not give my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have exacted it with usury ?” That is, he had been afraid of the risk and the trouble of putting the money out in traffic, lest it might be lost, and he did not consider that it was his lord's command that he should do this. He thought it was enough if he gave back what he had received, whereas he had received it for the purpose of trafficking. He did not consider himself a servant in the sense which our Lord had lately pointed out to them in the instruction about the “unprofitable servants”—that his whole being and

time, and all his faculties and powers and opportunities, belonged to his master, and that to do all and spend all and suffer all for him was but that which he was bound to do, and a service for which he could put his lord under no obligations. The part that concerned the servants in this parable is made to be, simply their faithfulness in the work which their lord gave them to do. The acquisition of the kingdom and the distribution of its prizes was not their work at all. But our Lord's disciples were very possibly full of thoughts about this last, and comparatively careless as to the discharge of their own duties, by which alone the Kingdom of Heaven could be won by them. Certainly, among the effects of the false estimation of the nature of the Kingdom under which even the Apostles to some extent laboured, must have been the especial danger of a relaxation of effort and energy in the comparatively plain, steady, and unexciting perseverance in work which was what was required in the ministers of the Kingdom. There was a forgetfulness of the chalice and the baptism in St. James and St. John when they came to ask for the seats on the right hand and on the left, when they ought to have asked to be the nearest to our Lord rather in toil than in dignity, rather in the Cross than in the Kingdom. And the words which our Lord puts into the mouth of the lord in the parable, in which he takes the slothful servant, and confutes him on his own ground, saying that if he knew the terms of service were hard, he ought all the more to have complied with them, show us that He thinks it well to insist even with His friends on the absolute sovereignty and ownership of God, as the best security

against the cowardice and timidity and fickleness of human purposes.

It is further to be observed that the treatment of the slothful servant is not very severe in this parable. The lord points out to him that he might have given the money into the bank, which would have kept it safe and added to it—a smaller interest indeed than that which was gained by the other two venturesome servants, who were so much commended for their enterprize. And the punishment for this negligence is in this parable the taking away from him the pound with which he had been entrusted, whereas in the other parable which we shall have to consider, delivered a few days later than this, the chastisement is added of casting the unprofitable servants into the exterior darkness. The lord, therefore, in this parable is represented as just, though a little severe. He insists upon his rights, expects diligence in his service, rewards the faithful munificently, and exposes the unfaithful unsparingly. For our Lord sometimes dwells on one characteristic of God, and sometimes on another. He describes Him as the Shepherd rejoicing in carrying home His lost sheep, and as the Father of the Prodigal, as well as the Judge Who will say to the wicked, “I never knew you.”

Another feature of God’s action with men is selected for illustration in the remainder of the sentence, as it may be called, passed on the unprofitable servant. “*And he said to them that stood by, Take the pound away from him, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. [And they said to him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.] But I say to you, that to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound, and from*

him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken from him." In the case of the servants, it was only natural that he who had made the most of the pound given him, multiplying it ten-fold, should be entrusted with more, and that this now should be the pound which the unprofitable servant had made nothing of. The first man deserved to receive the means of making still more, and the last man deserved to have that taken away from him which he had proved that he could not use well. When the pound is considered as representing the grace of God, opportunities of serving Him and increasing our own merit and His glory, or anything spiritually good which can be made profit of in the same way, some other considerations come in which make the conduct of the lord more plain as a representation of the methods and ways of God. All fruitfulness comes from Him, all graces are His gift, and the manner in which His saints make His graces more and more useful is His gift. A soul that is negligent in the use of grace must have a false idea of God, must think too lowly of His rights and of its own responsibilities. It must be blind in the midst of light, it can have little fervour, and must be in danger of losing what graces it has received. The soul which multiplies God's graces which it has received from Him, shows gratitude to Him, intelligence of the nature of the treasure He has committed to it, and confidence in His readiness to assist its increase. Above all, it will be truly humble, acknowledging the ownership of God in all His gifts, and this is the first condition of fruitfulness and increase. For God gives His graces to be used, and withdraws them when they are not used, and

He enriches the humble and fills the hungry with His good things. So it is in the natural way that He acts with us, when He takes away what is not used, and when He multiplies the graces given to those who are most faithful in the use of what they have received.

“But as for those my enemies who would not have me reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before me.” This completes the picture of the “reception of the kingdom” of which He is here speaking. There are several passages in the parable which show that He had in His mind His rejection by the Jews, the great crime which the nation would incur by His murder, and the awful chastisement which Providence would inflict upon them by the armies of Rome. He pictured Himself under the figure of the man after whom the citizens sent an embassage, saying they would not have him to reign over them. It was natural that this feature in the parable should be carried on to the end, and the end would be such as is represented in the words now before us. *“As for those my enemies, who would not have me reign over them, bring them hither and kill them before me.”* Such was indeed to be the lot of the enemies of our Lord, even in this world, inasmuch as His Death was a crime which Providence could not leave without punishment in this world as well as in the next. But the words are also true of the enemies of our Lord of whatever kind, for they will all stand before Him as their Judge, and on them will fall the chastisement of eternal death.

CHAPTER III.

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS.

St. Matt. xxi. 23—32 ; St. Mark xi. 27—33 ; St. Luke xx. 1—8 ;
Story of the Gospels, § 135.

THE Evangelists continue : “ But when He was come into the Temple, when He was walking in the Temple, teaching the people and preaching the Gospel, there came to him the Chief Priests and the Scribes and the ancients of the people, they met together and spoke to Him, saying, Tell us by what authority dost Thou these things, and who hath given Thee authority that Thou shouldst do these things, who is he that hath given Thee this authority ? ” The question, therefore, was put formally by those who were considered as the lawful rulers in the holy place, and it was put in the presence of the people who were assembled to listen to His teaching.

It can hardly be doubted that the question, asking about His doing these things, referred directly to what had been the last thing done by Him in the Temple, that is, the purging of the sacred place from the traffic which was there going on. As far as we know, this is the first occasion on which these enemies of our Lord had confronted Him since His arrival in Jerusalem, and His presence

in the Temple on the Day of Palms. Then they had noticed and remonstrated about the children crying Hosanna in the Temple, but it was only to ask Him, "Hearest Thou what these say?" and there was no extraordinary assemblage or solemnity to give their interference an official character. If it was that they remembered His words three years before, and intended to make them, if they were now repeated, the ground of a charge, our Lord must have known it, and He did not give them the opportunity. He answered their question, only in a manner that would silence them, without alleging the authority on which He acted, and His answer, as well as their question, was public, and in the presence of the people.

"Jesus answering said to them, I will also ask you one word, one thing, and answer you Me, which if you shall tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Answer Me. The baptism of John—whence was it? was it from Heaven, or from men? But they thought within themselves, saying, If we shall say, from Heaven, He will say to us, Why then did you not believe him? But if we say, from men, we fear the multitude, for all held John as a prophet. The whole people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet. For all men counted John that he was a prophet indeed. And they answered that they knew not whence it was. And answering Jesus, they said, We know not. He also said to them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things."

This answer of our Blessed Lord must not be considered as a mere skilful evasion of a question by

means of which the persons who were thus baffled had intended to embarrass Him and lead Him to some avowal which they might use against Him. The works of God are all beautifully ordered, and when He addresses to His people a series of truths and revelations concerning Himself, the earlier links of the chain must be grasped before the later links, and if the first truths are not accepted, there will be a difficulty in receiving the last. The last link, so to say, in the chain of evidences and declarations, by means of which it was divinely ordered that men should recognize our Lord when He came, was the baptism and testimony of St. John. The people had accepted this baptism as a call from God to penance, and their hearts had thus been prepared to receive the teaching of St. John as to our Lord's Person, which had then been speedily and magnificently confirmed in other ways, especially by the testimony of His Father when He was baptized, and the many miracles by which His Mission had been authenticated.

Probably, of all the multitudes who had the opportunity of preparation given them by the baptism of John, few had neglected it without injury to their souls, and without, in particular, being unable to close with the Divine counsel to which it was the introduction. This is what St. Luke speaks of when he says that "all the people and the publicans justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and lawyers despised the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized by him."¹ And now, when the ultimate reprobation of these enemies of

¹ St. Luke vii. 29, 30.

God was imminent, our Lord quietly and solemnly sends them back to that "counsel of God" which they had despised. If the baptism of John was from Heaven, the testimony of John also was from Heaven, and if the testimony of John was once received by them, they would have no difficulty in receiving the acts and words of Him to Whom St. John bore witness, especially as they were authenticated by so many further testimonies more splendid and more evidently Divine than his. There would then have been no need of a question about our Lord's authority, whether to purge the Temple or to teach anything that He might think well to teach as the Messenger of God.

Our Lord further explained His words by a parable, which they listened to in silence. "*But what think you? A certain man had two sons, and coming to the first he said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. And he answering said, I will not. But afterwards, being moved with repentance, he went. And coming to the other, he said in like manner. And he answering said, I go, sir, and he went not. Which of the two did the father's will?* They say to Him, The first. Jesus saith to them, Amen, I say to you, that the publicans and the harlots shall go into the Kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of justice, and you did not believe him. But the publicans and the harlots believed him. But you, seeing it, did not even afterwards repent, that you might believe him."

St. John's coming in the way of justice seems to mean that he was a preacher and exemplar of penitence, in which sense the word "justice" is sometimes used in the New Testament, that is, in the sense of repentance and satisfaction.

The parable is thus explained by our Lord Himself, and we have only to draw out the doctrine which His explanation contains. The application to the two classes, the Scribes and Pharisees, on the one hand, and the publicans and harlots on the other, is not meant to be exact in every particular. The priests were not called before the people, and the people afterwards, nor the reverse, but all at the same time. All were called, and called to repentance, which is the point on which our Lord insists.

The call to penance, which was at first resisted by the first son, and then, on repentance, listened to, represents the condition of the class to which the publicans and sinners generally belonged, whose life was openly such that they plainly needed penance and conversion. This was the class which was made ready to receive our Lord by its obedience to the call of penance made by St. John. The other son, who is said to have promised obedience, and not to have fulfilled the promise, consisted of the priests and rulers on whom the call to penance fell dead. They professed a general obedience to the Divine law, but they were not prepared to obey it when it invited them to a change of life. The working in the vineyard is a general description of what our Lord called elsewhere, "working the work of God,"² that is, believing on Him Whom He had sent, for which in this case penance and conversion of life were required.

Our Lord says that the people did penance, and they were fitted for faith. They had not obeyed God before, but now they obeyed Him by conversion.

² St. John vi. 29.

The priests declined the invitation. They appeared to themselves not to need penance, and in consequence they remained unconverted, and the result was inability to believe even all the evidences which were accumulated before their eyes in favour of our Lord. Our Lord tells them, that when they saw the conversion of the people going on before their eyes, even then they did not repent that they might believe. He puts penitence, as preached, according to the "counsel of God," by St. John, as the necessary foundation of belief. Penitence produced humility, and humility enlightenment. Those who thought they did not need conversion, missed the light, and so were unable to believe.

It cannot be doubted that the priests to whom our Lord spoke were far better able to appreciate these evidences of His Mission which addressed themselves to the intelligence, than the uninstructed people. They were versed in the Scriptures, and knew the prophecies of so many various kinds, personal and other, the light of which centred in our Lord. They could understand better than others the needs of the world, and the beauty of the provisions for its healing which were made by Him. They have their counterpart in the many clear and well-instructed minds of our time, which can see how well the Christian system is adapted to satisfy the intellectual and moral needs of our nature as it is in the world, and how inadequate and feeble are all other religious systems for that purpose. But they cannot believe. The first process in conversion is wanting—the humility which acknowledges the sinful heart, the life stained and degraded, which need cleansing and elevating, which

need above all things a Physician and a Redeemer. So it is with many outside the Church, who are too acute to be blinded by the sophistries of heresy, the open self-contradictions of schism, but who find themselves in positions not unlike that of these priests of the Temple, and who might forego the worldly comforts and emoluments which belong to such, but who cannot yet brook the humiliation, ever so sweetly tempered as it may be by mercy, of kneeling to one of their brother men in a Catholic confessional. So they argue and find fault and cavil about the most unimportant matters, they rake up the dead ashes of extinct controversies, and sift the dust of old exploded fables against the Church, while she stands before them in the full blaze of Divine evidence, pointing her out as the only possible possessor of the notes registered for them in the Catholic Creeds, as clearly as our Lord was marked out as the Messenger of God by the miracles which the Jews could not gainsay. Such men lack the compunction of heart, the self-abasement from consciousness of sin and fear of judgment, which is the most powerful element in all conversion, and not in conversion alone, but throughout the whole Christian life, and especially in all that has to do with the ministering at the altar and preaching the holy Word of God.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PARABLE OF THE HUSBANDMEN.

St. Matt. xxi. 33—46 ; St. Mark xii. 1—12 ; St. Luke xx. 9—19 ;
Story of the Gospels, § 136.

THE Parable of the Vineyard and the Husbandmen, which follows on that of the Two Sons, in the three Evangelists, seems to have been delivered by our Lord without any break between the two. St. Mark and St. Luke preface it by the words, “He began to speak unto them in parables,” “He began to speak to the people in parables,” but they probably do this because they have not mentioned the parable which we have just been considering, which is peculiar to St. Matthew. It seems that the Chief Priests and elders were still with Him, and that they are the persons to whom the parable was addressed, and who answer the question at the end, “When therefore the Lord of the vineyard shall come, what shall He do to these husbandmen ?” And again, it is said that they knew, that is, they came to understand that He spoke this parable unto them, that is, with reference to them, and that after it was finished, “leaving Him, they went their way.” This parable, therefore, like that of the Two Sons, was especially addressed to them, although the people as well as they heard it. In this it seems to be

distinguished from the other which follows, that of the Wedding Supper of the King's Son.

"There was a man who was a householder, who planted a vineyard, and made a hedge about it, and dug a place for the wine-vat, a press, and built a tower and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a strange, a far, country, and he was abroad for a long time."

Unlike so many of the parables of our Lord, this is founded upon a well-known passage in the Old Testament, with which these Chief Priests must have been perfectly familiar. The repetition of the imagery must certainly have been designed by our Lord to impress on them more forcibly the doctrine which He was about to lay down. Isaias had said,^{*} "I will sing to my beloved the canticle of my cousin concerning his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a hill in a fruitful place, and he fenced it in and picked the stones out of it, and planted it with the choicest vines, and built a tower in the midst thereof, and set up a wine-press therein, and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." He goes on, as we shall see, to make it quite plain that the vineyard is a parabolic image for Juda and Jerusalem. The beginning of the parable must therefore have pointed to the application of the whole to themselves in the minds of the priests, and they must have been prepared for a strain of complaint and reproach, though far less severe than that which is contained in the actual parable. But the great point of all, that it was to apply directly to themselves, the rulers of the holy people, must have been plain to them at once.

* Isaias v. 1.

Isaias goes on, “ And now, O ye inhabitants of Jerusalem and ye men of Juda, judge between Me and My vineyard. What is there that I ought to do more to My vineyard, and I have not done to it? Was it that I looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it hath brought forth wild grapes? And now I will show you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away the hedge thereof and it shall be wasted, I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down, and I will make it desolate, and it shall not be pruned, and it shall not be digged; but briars and thorns shall come up, and I will command the clouds to rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the man of Juda His pleasant plant, and I looked that he should do judgment, and behold, iniquity, and do justice, and behold a cry.” It is not necessary to endeavour here to explain all the particulars in the parable of Isaias. But it is clear that the lot of the vineyard is a prophetic representation of the manner in which God was to deal with the Jewish Church by the Babylonian Captivity, and it is not difficult to follow in general the chief outlines, the destruction of its fences and wall, desolation, want of cultivation and care, the consequent overgrowth of the thorns and briars, and last of all, the terrible chastisement, which is represented by the words that God will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. With the history of this former chastisement before them, the Jewish priests must have been already prepared for the denunciation of very terrible woes indeed upon the vineyard in its coming desolation.

They might have been prepared for much, but

hardly for the exact words which follow. The prophecy of Isaias goes on to denounce a series of woes on the people of that time, but our Lord keeps to the image of the parable, making the new feature which He has introduced into it the most prominent of all. That new feature is the “husbandmen” to whom the vineyard was let out, “*And at the season, when the time of the fruits drew nigh, he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard. He sent other servants to the husbandmen that they might receive the fruit thereof: who having laid hands on him, beat him and sent him away empty. And again he sent to them another servant, and they wounded him in the head and used him reproachfully, they beat him also, and treating him reproachfully, sent him away empty. And again he sent the third, and they wounded him also and cast him out. And the husbandmen laying hands on his servants beat one and killed another, and stoned another. And again he sent other servants more than the former, and they did to them in like manner. And again he sent another, and him they killed and many others, some of whom they beat and others they killed.*”

We have here, then, the beginning of that part of this great parable which is our Lord's own. The desolation and barrenness which have fallen on the vineyard in the prophecy of Isaias, are changed into something more hateful and aggressive against the honour of God. We have the human agents to whom the care of the vineyard has been committed, and their treatment of their Lord and His messengers becomes the chief part of the picture. By the messengers must be understood all the prophets and just men of the elder dispensation, all of whom were in their turn persecuted by the people and

their rulers. Our Lord was presently to reproach them with their own confession, that they were the children of those who slew the prophets, although that confession was accompanied by an attempt to dissociate themselves from the guilt of their fore-fathers. Jerusalem was now to Him, “Thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee !” And He bids them fill up the measure of their fathers. And the great speech of St. Stephen, in the Acts of the Apostles, is a continuation of the same strain.² St. Stephen begins with the persecution of Joseph and of Moses, the continual relapse of the people into apostacy, and ends by telling them, “Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Ghost, as your fathers did, so do you also. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted ? and they have slain those who foretold of the coming of the Just One, of Whom you have been now the betrayers and murderers, who have received the Law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it !”

The words of St. Stephen about the betrayal and murder of the Just One do not go beyond what is contained in the parable here given by our Lord. For after describing so carefully the various treatments which had been meted out to the messengers of God, He goes on to add a third part to the picture, “*Therefore, having yet one son most dear to him, he also sent him to them last of all saying, They will reverence my son ! What shall I do ? I will send my beloved son, it may be, when they see him, they will reverence him. And in like manner, last of all, he sent to them his son, saying, They will reverence my son !*

² Acts vii.

But the husbandmen, when they saw him, thought within themselves, saying, This is the heir, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours—come, let us kill him, and we shall have his inheritance. And laying hold on him, they killed him and cast him out of the vineyard —they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him.” And then, without further explanation, He puts the fearful question, “*What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do unto them? When therefore the lord of the vineyard is come, what shall he do to these husbandmen?*”

The three accounts of the Evangelists differ here only in this, that St. Matthew makes the answer to this question come from the priests themselves, and the other two put the words into our Lord’s mouth. It is easy to suppose that the excitement of the moment was great, and that the priests took the answer to themselves, partly moved by great indignation against the supposed husbandmen, partly, perhaps, suspecting that He was drawing their own portrait, and wishing to anticipate the charge, by themselves declaring that the husbandmen were worthy of any amount of punishment. And then our Lord, with great gravity and solemnity, would take their own words from them, and apply them to themselves. There is something like the answer of the priests in the answer of David to Nathan, when he had put to him the parable about Bathsheba. “*David’s anger being exceedingly kindled against that man, he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this is a child of death. He shall restore the ewe four-fold, because he did this thing, and had no pity.*” And Nathan said to David, *Thou art the man!*” Here the priests answer first, and our Lord then fixes the

sentence on them. “*They say to Him, He will bring those men to an evil end, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, that shall render him fruit in due season.*” Our Lord adds, as it were ratifying their words, “*He will come and destroy those husbandmen, and will give the vineyard to others.*” And then their consciences smote them, “*Which they hearing said to Him, God forbid!*”

The application of the parable to their own case was almost too palpable. The variation between the Evangelists seems to bring out the scene more distinctly before our eyes. In both cases, the parable ends with a question, “What therefore will the lord of the vineyard, when he shall come, do to those husbandmen?” In St. Matthew’s account the Jews answer our Lord themselves. They say to Him, “He will bring those evil men to an evil end, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, that shall render him fruit in due season.” In the other two, the answer is in our Lord’s own mouth, “He will come, and will destroy those husbandmen, and will give the vineyard to others.” And then the Jews answer, “Which they hearing, said to Him, God forbid.” The accounts are both correct, if we understand that our Lord spoke first, and the people echoed His words, or it may be, they gave the answer, and He repeated it in so solemn a manner, as to strike them with fear and make them cry out, “God forbid!” For they were hanging upon His lips, and were so absorbed in the interest of what they heard as to be ready to anticipate the conclusion of the parable before He uttered it.

Then our Lord, as we may well suppose, thrust

home the terrible lesson He had been teaching. The language passes beyond the parabolic veil in which His meaning had been wrapped up. "Jesus saith to them, Have you never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? By the Lord this has been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes. Therefore I say to you, that the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and shall be given to a nation yielding the fruits thereof"—in these last words, reverting to the imagery of the parable just delivered. And then He added the other terrible truth about the chastisement of their resistance to God. "And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be bruised, shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder."

The image which our Lord here uses has become famous in Sacred Scripture, both from this passage and from the manner in which it has been adopted by the Apostles after Him. The Scriptural origin of the image may be traced to Isaias.³ The Prophet is speaking of the low condition into which Jerusalem had fallen and was yet to fall, and then adds a promise of restoration. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lay a stone in the foundations of Sion, a tried stone, a corner stone, a precious stone, founded in the foundation. He that believeth, let him not hasten." The Psalm from which our Lord quotes is the 117th, which is thought to have been used at the festival of joy at the dedication of the second Temple, after the Captivity, as related in the First Book of Esdras.⁴ Many words of this

³ Isaias xxviii. 16..

⁴ 1 Esdras vi. 19—22.

Psalm were still ringing in the ears of the people, as it is the source from which the shouts of Hosanna, and the words, "Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord," had been taken by the people on the Day of Palms. This may have been one reason why our Lord used it now, and we cannot read it over without seeing how pointedly it prophesies of the great Sacrifice which now filled His mind. The first part of the Psalm is thanksgiving for the wonderful deliverance of the people from their many and most powerful enemies, and the words certainly fit very well the occasion which has been mentioned. "All nations compassed me about, and in the name of the Lord I have been revenged on them. Surrounding me, they compassed me about, and in the name of the Lord I have been revenged on them. They surrounded me like bees, and they burned like fire among thorns, and in the name of the Lord I was revenged on them. Being pushed, I was overturned that I might fall, but the Lord supported me. The Lord is my strength and my praise, and is become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and of salvation is in the tabernacles of the just. The right hand of the Lord hath wrought strength, the right hand of the Lord hath exalted me, the right hand of the Lord hath wrought strength. I shall not die, but live, and shall declare the works of the Lord. The Lord chastising hath chastised me, but He hath not delivered me over to death. Open ye to me the gates of justice, I will go into them and give praise to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, the just shall enter into it. I will give glory to Thee because Thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.

The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner. This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made, let us be glad and rejoice therein. O Lord, save me, O Lord, give good increase, Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord. We have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and He hath shone upon us. Appoint a solemn day, with shady boughs, even in the horns of the altar."⁵

It may be remarked that the passage about the stone which the builders rejected seems to be grounded on the passage of Isaias just quoted, in which the promise of the stone follows upon another in which the priests and prophets in charge of Jerusalem are described as having abandoned hope. "The scornful men who rule over My people Israel." God promises, notwithstanding, abundant salvation and prosperity. Thus the passage in the Psalm is a kind of commentary on the words of the Prophet. Our Lord now uses it with immense force against His enemies, pressing on them the sacred words which apply so closely to the circumstances of His own reception. The "builders" were those who answered to the rulers spoken of in Isaias, the "scornful men" who were now in prominence over the people. They were now about to reject Him, but God was about to make Him Whom they rejected "the head of the corner." A few weeks later, after St. Peter had worked the first great apostolical miracle on the infirm man⁶ who lay at

⁵ The more exact rendering is given by some as "bind the victim with cords, up to the horns of the altar."

⁶ Acts iii. 10—12.

the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, he could thus speak to these same rulers. "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom you crucified, Whom God hath raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was rejected by you the builders, which is become the head of the corner, neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved."

The same Apostle expands the image in his first Epistle in a manner which shows the treasures of doctrine it contains for Christian contemplatives. He speaks of Christians as stones, like our Lord, "Unto Whom coming, as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen and made honourable by God, be you also as living stones built up, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore it is said in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious. And he that shall believe on Him shall not be confounded. To you therefore that believe is honour, but to them that believe not, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of scandal, to them that stumble at the word, neither do they believe, whereunto also they are set."⁷

This text of St. Peter is interesting as showing the way in which the Apostles sometimes combine different parts of the same prophecy. St. Peter here refers to another passage of Isaias,⁸ where he

⁷ 1 St. Peter ii. 4—8. ⁸ Isaias viii. 13, 14.

says, "Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread, and He shall be a sanctification to you. But for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence to the two houses of Israel, for a snare and a ruin to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." And in this use of the prophecy St. Paul, when he speaks of the causes of the reprobation of the Jews, follows St. Peter. "They," that is, the Jews, "stumbled at the stumbling-stone, as it is written, Behold I lay in Sion a stumbling-stone, and a rock of scandal, and whosoever believeth in Him shall not be confounded,"⁹—where, it is evident, St. Paul blends the two parts of the prophecy together.

Our Lord adds a few words to the reference to prophecy. For in these parables, and indeed in all His dealings with the Chief Priests during this week, He is speaking judicially as well as prophetically, and is passing sentence on His enemies as well as reasoning with them. He takes up the image of the corner stone, and applies it to the various lots of those who oppose him. But He first declares quite plainly and without any parable, the truth which He has been putting before them parabolically. "Therefore, I say to you," not simply as applying Scripture, but as declaring on His own authority, "the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and shall be given to a nation yielding the fruits thereof." There is here no warning or threat that this will be done if they do not repent. He speaks as if the national sin were already accomplished, and the punishment which it involved already determined in the decrees of God.

⁹ Rom. ix. 33.

"And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder." It is easy to understand that a person stumbling over a large corner stone, even by mistake or carelessness, will fall and bruise himself. Even those who oppose our Lord and His Church unwittingly, and still more with an ignorance for which they are partly responsible, will injure themselves. And this we see in history and in common life. No one ever really prospers who attacks the Church, and if the temporal punishment is not inflicted in this life on the offender, it falls on his family, or it is reserved for himself in the next world. On the other hand, when the offence is more malicious and greater, and the opposition to God and the Church more open and deliberate, the judgment of God falls on that person in the terrible doom of eternal damnation, which is expressed in the words, "On whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder." For such persons put themselves in open hostility and rebellion to God, Whose Providential action in the world, and for the salvation of mankind, is directly resisted and hindered by such sins as deliberate persecution of the Church, wilful schism, and heresy, and the like. The Apostle tells St. Titus not to argue much with such. "A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition avoid, knowing that he that is such a one is subverted and sinneth, being condemned by his own judgment."¹⁰

Thus did our Lord speak plainly and, as has been said, judicially to His enemies, the rulers of the holy people, in the Temple, and in the hearing

¹⁰ Titus iii. 10, 11.

of all. The time had come when He no longer cared to keep any measures with them. He had no wish now to delay the appointed consummation of their wickedness, for that wickedness was to bring about the redemption of the world. The Evangelists tell us that the Chief Priests quite understood Him. "And when the Chief Priests and Pharisees had heard His parables, they knew that He spoke of them. And seeking to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they held Him as a Prophet. And leaving Him, they went their way." That is, they would have seized Him then and there if it had been in their power. As it was not, and as He had openly braved their official authority, they had nothing to do but to withdraw.

CHAPTER V.

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING OF THE KING'S SON.

St. Matt. xxii. 1—14; *Story of the Gospels*, § 137.

WE have seen that after the parables of which we have lately spoken had been delivered by our Lord, the Chief Priests had left Him in indignation. They had discerned plainly enough the intention with which those parables had been spoken. At the same time they could not help fearing for themselves, if they made any open attempt upon Him in the presence of the people. We may suppose then that He was left by them in comparative peace for the rest of the time which could be given to teaching on that day, and that He employed it, as was His wont, in instructing the people in the Temple. His teaching would thus fall back on its usual lines, though it would to some extent be modified in character by the circumstances of the time and occasion on which He was teaching. It must be remembered, then, in studying the parable now before us, how momentous that time and that occasion were.

The parable which had just been delivered had conveyed to the priests with very little ambiguity indeed, the truth that the Jewish Synagogue was now rejected by God; that the Kingdom of God,

that the system in which the true religion, the promises, the hopes of the human race, were all bound up, and through which the special means of grace belonging to that religion had been opened to the faithful, was now to be transferred to another people, who were to become the true children of Abraham and heir of the blessings allotted to his race. And this solemn sentence had been pronounced in the Temple itself, by the King Who had lately entered it in triumph in the name of the Lord, amid the Hosannas of the multitudes. It had been communicated to the Chief Priests, as the representatives of the holy nation, and had been understood by them almost in its full significance. Moreover, the solemnity which had taken place in the Temple had been an offering to God on the part of our Lord of Himself as the Victim for the Redemption of the world, in the Sacrifice which was so speedily to be consummated on the Cross. Under such circumstances, the teaching of our Lord in the Temple assumed a new character. He had not simply to declare the annulling of the former and figurative system, but to lay down the principles and conditions of the new order of things which was to succeed in its fulfilment to the Old Law. That system was to be wide, and large, indulgent, full of mercy and grace, of life and spirit, it was not to be exclusive or severe, or hard in its requirements and obligations, its yoke was to be light, and its burthen sweet, and yet, with all these elements of condescension, it was a Kingdom, the system of a King, and, as the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen had set forth the chastisement of those who had been disobedient under the former system, so there

was to be in the new system a royal way of dealing with the presumptuous and disobedient.

The teaching of the parable which immediately follows in the first Evangelist seems exactly to correspond to these conditions under which our Lord was now speaking. It is not one of those which were directly addressed to the Chief Priests, as distinct from the people. At the same time, it seems to refer to the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, which had just been delivered, in a manner which shows that the particular lesson of the former was still before our Lord's mind as important to all. The people seem to have been present as well as the Chief Priests when the former was spoken. But the reference to the chastisement of the Wicked Husbandmen is here only introduced in a parenthetic manner. The more important part of the parable is probably the concluding section, for the sake of which it was perhaps spoken on this occasion, and this section requires the former portion as its foundation. It is also remarkable that the parable before us is in some degree a repetition of that of the Great Supper, which St. Luke places at an earlier stage of our Lord's teaching. That is, the substance is the same in both parables, though there are many important changes, as might be expected from the circumstances of the time. The Parable of the Great Supper had not, as far as we know, been delivered in public. It was spoken by our Lord when He was in the house of the friendly Pharisee, and therefore to a comparatively limited audience.¹ Above all, it was not spoken after our Lord had assumed, what we may call the character of judge.

¹ St. Luke xiv. 15—24; *Story of the Gospels*, § 112.

We shall point out the variations which our Lord introduced, now that He was speaking to the people collected in the Temple, after the beginning of the Week of His Passion, and then give a short commentary on this its second version, as it may be called.

"And Jesus answering, spoke again in parables to them, saying, *The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a king who made a marriage for his son.*" In the former parable it is only, "A certain man made a great supper, and invited many." The circumstances are therefore raised in dignity—the man becomes a king, and the feast is not merely a great supper, but a wedding feast for the son of the king. "*And he sent his servants to call them that were invited to the marriage, and they would not come.*" This summoning of the guests who had been invited at the time of the feast itself, seems to belong to the customs of the Oriental nations. In this parable it is merely said that the guests would not come. In the former parable we are told that "they began at once to make excuse"—and the excuses are given in detail. "The first said, I have bought a farm, and must needs go out and see it, and another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to try them, and another said, I have married a wife." This last says, "Therefore I cannot come," and the others each beg to be excused. In the present parable, although it is a king who invites them on so special an occasion, there are no excuses made, but there is a simple refusal to come.

Another very significant difference is that in this later version of the same narrative, the king, notwithstanding his dignity, condescends to send

again to pray the guests to come, whereas in the former it is never open to those who have once refused to regain their opportunity. “*Again he sent other servants, saying, Tell them that were invited, Behold, my beeves and fatlings are killed, and all things are ready, come ye to the wedding. But they neglected, and went their ways, the one to his farm, and another to his merchandise.*” Nor is it simply a case of neglect. “*And the rest laid hands on his servants, and having contumeliously treated them, put them to death.*” This then is something entirely new, as far as the comparison between the two parables is concerned, and it appears, as we have said, to be a reminiscence of what has been lately said by our Lord in the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen. And it is followed by another entirely new feature, in keeping with it, for our Lord adds, “*But when the King had heard of it he was angry, and sending his armies he destroyed those murderers and burnt their city.*” These details would have been out of place in the former parable, where the host, whose invitation had been slighted, is a simple individual without authority or power. It is only said there that the master of the house was told of these things, that is, of the excuses of the invited guests, and was angry at it—so much as to declare that none of those who were invited should taste of his supper. The vengeance in the later parable is quite in keeping with the kingly character of the host, in consequence of which the rudeness of the guests in the former parable becomes an insult to authority and a disloyalty in the parable now before us.

The sequel to the refusal of the guests is more fully drawn out in the parable in St. Luke than in

that before us. There the master of the house says to his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and the feeble and the blind and the lame. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said to the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in that my house may be filled. But I say unto you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper." In the present parable, there is one sending out into the highways and no more. "*Then saith he to his servants, The marriage is ready, but they that were invited were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, call to the marriage. And his servants going forth into the ways, gathered together all that they found, both bad and good, and the marriage was filled with guests.*"

We now come to the last portion of the parable before us, which is entirely new and has no counterpart in the former. "*And the king went in to see the guests, and he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment. And he said to him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment? But he was silent. Then the king said to the waiters, Bind his hands and feet and cast him into the exterior darkness—there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" "*For,*" our Lord adds, "*many are called, but few are chosen.*" This then is what we gather from a comparison between the two parables, and we have now to explain the several truths which may be found set forth in them.

We need make but little question that the banquet to which the guests are here invited is the

feast on the Gospel blessings, which is set forth by God in the Church. This involves, for those who enjoy it lawfully and profitably, the further banquet on the ineffable blessings of the Heavenly Kingdom. But it is something present, which is to be accepted and entered upon here and now, as is evident, if from nothing else, from the exclusion of the unworthy guest, and the declaration with which our Lord concludes His teaching, that the called are many, but the chosen or elect few. On the former occasion our Lord had spoken to the guests at an entertainment to which He was Himself invited, and the parable had been elicited from Him by the words of one of those present who had been apparently so moved by His gracious conversation that he could not refrain from exclaiming, "Blessed are they that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God!" Here there was no such invitation to speak. But our Lord seems to have desired to teach the privileges of the Gospel banquet, and He does so in language which goes beyond what He had before used, both, as has been pointed out, in the matter of the magnificence of the occasion, for it is the wedding of the king's son of which He now speaks in which all the guests seem to have been provided, or to have provided themselves with fitting robes, and in the obligatory character of the invitation on those who had received it.

Thus, then, in the earlier parable there is no punishment beyond the exclusion from the banquet for those who were so foolish as to despise it, and when they did so it seems to have been with a certain air of liberty and equality between themselves and their inviter which is altogether wanting

in the later parable. There would be something rude in saying to a king, "I pray thee hold me excused," on account of ordinary employments. Our Lord then adds this further line to the teaching which He had already delivered, by making it the command of a sovereign which is neglected or despised. This teaching implies the truth that the acceptance of the Gospel privileges is obligatory, although it is left within the power of the human will to turn away from them when they are brought home to it, for we are responsible to our Maker and Judge for the choice which we make, although He does not now force us to make the choice that is right. For we are His creatures and belong to Him by an absolute dominion, which has no parallel in creation, and we have no right, though we have the power, being free, to disobey His commands, even if they were hard and unprofitable to ourselves. On the other hand, we see in the comparative magnificence of the banquet in this last parable some allusion to the truth that now, after the Day of Palms, on which the great Sacrifice of our Lord was practically and formally begun, He speaks of the Wedding Feast of the King's Son, and seems to invite our thoughts to dwell on all the riches and splendours of grace that are laid before us in the Church, all of them flowing from and being applications of the fruits of that Sacrifice.

We seem to see a further advance in the doctrine of this parable over that of the former, in the measure that is dealt out by the great justice of God to those who decline His invitation, and thus put themselves in the position of rebels against Him. It seems a strange thing that persons invited

in the way here mentioned, and to so great an honour and blessing as the sharing in the wedding supper of the son of a king, should not only neglect the invitation and treat it with indifference, but should go on further to heaping insult and contumely on the messengers, and even still further, to the putting them to death. There is nothing of this kind in the former parable. There the neglectful guests allege the excuses that have been mentioned, and these are so framed by our Lord as to embrace the three great concupiscences, which are the springs in human nature of everything that debases and degrades it, and turns away the mind, which is given to man to feed on the things of God, down to the lower pleasures and the interests and ambitions of this world.

In the second parable our Lord takes a feature from the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, and adds it to the picture as drawn before. The great work of Redemption has been begun, the time is come for the Passion of the Son of Man by which that Redemption is to be wrought. The message which invites mankind to share in the Gospel feast necessarily includes the acceptance of the Gospel revelation of the great mercies of God through Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. It involves the obligation of obedience to His Law and the following of His example, as well as the enjoyment of the privileges won by the Precious Blood. It involves, therefore, faith, submission, obedience, humility, mortification, penitence, a life above the world, a trampling on all that the world and the flesh hold dear. It is a message, therefore, which the natural man hates, which the world abhors and makes war

upon, because its own fallacies and impostures are exposed thereby. So it is true, in the actual history of which this parable is the figure, that the messengers of the great King are not only disregarded and neglected, but insulted, ill-treated, or even slain. And now that our Lord has just spoken of the execution of the terrible sentence upon the Jewish nation for the guilt which it was to incur by His own murder, it is natural that He should no longer hold back this truth, even though, under other circumstances, it might have seemed out of place in this parable. He adds, therefore, both the circumstance of the ill-treatment and murder of the messengers of God, deputed to bring to men the glad tidings of their salvation, and also the judgment that would fall on those who so dealt with them, in their temporal punishment even in this world. This seems to be the explanation of the King sending His armies, destroying the murderers, and burning up their cities.

The direct course of the parable is interrupted by our Lord for the purpose of introducing the outrages inflicted on the messengers of the King as well as the punishment of the offenders. It looks at first sight as if this might be merely a reminiscence of the Parable of the Husbandmen, inserted by our Lord for the sake of connecting the two in the minds of the hearers. But we can see that it is not merely a reminiscence. It is also a warning. And it will surely be wisdom not to pass over this lesson in considering this parable, not to forget to call to mind the truth that the good message of the Gospel, with all its graciousness and beauty, its fair promises of ineffable happiness and strength and recompence,

must always find in us, as long as we are in the flesh, something which is stirred up by it to hostility and rebellion. For it is not only a message which nature does not care for, as something spiritual and too high for us, but also one which speaks with authority and enjoins obedience, and implies mortification of all that is natural in submitting to it, and threatens, moreover, chastisement if we do not yield it obedience. To strive against the stream of the world while we are in it, and to fix our gaze on the things which are heavenly and eternal while we are beset by the things of sense, which pass away—this requires an effort and a continuance of exertion by which our natural feebleness and inconsistency, our need of novelty and variety, are overtasked. And if our Lord seems to go out of His way to introduce this feature in His teaching, still it is in truth a necessary feature in any accurate picture of our present condition. Our Lord is preparing us beforehand for the feature of the “man without a wedding garment.” There is therefore something more than a history of the past in the chastisement of these first offenders against the king, who refused his invitation.

Our Lord proceeds with the parable on the lines on which it had been first delivered. In His former teaching He had seemed to draw the distinction between the first and second sending of the servants to bring in guests, first into the streets and lanes, and then into the highways and hedges, and something has been said in the proper place as to the truths which may be illustrated by the distinction. In the first parable more stress is laid on the desire of the lord that his house may be filled at any

cost, save that of bringing in those who had been in the first instance invited. In the present parable there is less on this head. The guests first bidden are declared to be unworthy, and the servants are sent out to the highways to bring in all that they find. They gather together all, "good and bad," it is especially said, "and the marriage is filled with guests."

Here the great truth is set forth once again, that the law of substitution characterizes the Kingdom of God. That law is always being enforced, but it was never to be more signally enforced than in the first age of the Church, in the rejection of the Jews and the vocation of the Gentiles, for which our Lord seems at this time to have been anxious to prepare the minds of the disciples. The truth had, indeed, been enunciated at the very beginning of the Gospel preaching, when St. John Baptist had warned the Jews against the danger of trusting their ancestors alone as sufficient to secure for them the benefits of the Kingdom, "for God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." But the more immediate point of doctrine which forms the principal feature in this parable, is the truth that not even admission to all the Gospel privileges is enough unless they are received and used with the required dispositions, and on the conditions laid down by God. This is set forth in the concluding section of the parable.

"And the king went in to see the guests. And he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment. And he said to him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment? But he was silent. Then the king said to the

waiters, Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The action of the king going in to see or look upon the guests, seems to imply that the banquet was not possibly to begin without it, as if there was a certain examination to be made of the guests, or as if the king was to have the satisfaction of gazing upon them and welcoming them. This Greek word,² used for "seeing," often seems to be used in the sense of considering and enjoying the sight as something rare or at least pleasurable. There can be no doubt that in this context it signifies something of the same kind—the scrutinizing look under which all the guests in the Gospel Kingdom will have passed before they begin to enjoy it, as well as the delight which God will vouchsafe to take in the saints when they are at last assembled together for the happiness of Heaven. But there are many intimations in this passage that the parable describes, not the ultimate enjoyment of the Heavenly Feast so much as the banquet of good things, blessings, and graces almost without end, that are the inheritance of the children of the Church here below.

We are bid to remember that the enjoyment of the earthly privileges of the Church has its own certain conditions. The admittance into the Church is entrusted to men, who cannot know the heart, and may therefore be deceived, and even deceive themselves. And our Lord does not extend this parable so as to make it a picture of that judgment of God on each human soul, or on all human souls collectively, which is to take place at the Particular

² θεάσασθαι.

or General Judgment. But there are certain conditions of admission to the Church which are not simply interior, and which may therefore be noticed by all, as this man was conspicuously different from the other guests. The Jews knew well enough who was and who was not formally admitted to the privileges of the Synagogue. There must be something corresponding to this in the new Kingdom, unless—which is contrary to the truth—we consider it as an entirely interior and spiritual kingdom. But such a kingdom could not contain both “bad and good,” as our Lord says, nor could any one be in it without a “wedding garment.” We have therefore to consider what this necessary condition may be, without which, as our Lord here teaches us, we are to have no right to the privileges of His Kingdom.

The “wedding garment,” which this one of the guests did not wear, must be the necessary qualifications to the banquet; and this, as has been said, represents the feast of good things which is set before us in the Church now, which good things are to ensure us hereafter the possession of God in Heaven. It is said that in Eastern countries it is the custom for the guests of a sovereign on solemn occasions to have precious robes given them to wear, and these robes may be presented to them as their own, or placed on them when they enter the presence of the King, to be worn as long as they are there. Those who are without them must therefore have refused to wear them, and be guilty in consequence of some disrespect. We should think it disrespectful, in a similar case, not to put on our best clothes for the entertainment given us by a prince, and if there were any uniform dress or

decoration required by custom at such times, we should consider it an offence not to wear it. This seems to be the offence attributed to the presumptuous guest. He answers to men who think, because the doors of the Christian Church are opened so wide that all may come in, because the faithful servants of the King are, by His order, so eager to bring in all, whosoever they may be, that therefore the treasures which she offers so freely to all are to be enjoyed without loyal submission to her rules as a society and a kingdom. In the earthly feasts given by sovereigns no one ever ventures to disregard the laws and rules by which such banquets are governed. Our Lord would have us, in using the blessings He has given us in the Church, remember that we are in the Presence of the King of kings, Who, indeed, gives Himself to us with ineffable love and tenderness, but Whose majesty must never be forgotten, nor Whose least prescription, or what seems such, be trifled with.

Thus our Lord Himself has said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not, shall be condemned,"³ and that, "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."⁴ Here are conditions laid down by our Lord Himself for citizenship in the New Kingdom. St. Paul adds, explaining the precept of faith, "This is the word of faith, which we preach. For if thou confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him up from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart, we believe unto justice, and with the mouth, confession

³ St. Mark xvi. 16. ⁴ St. John iii. 5.

is made unto salvation.”⁵ These are some of the laws of the Kingdom, and simple as they seem, they involve the obligation of complete obedience to all that the Church teaches us as necessary for belief and practice, an obedience which is treasonably and rebelliously violated by the slightest wilful dereliction of what may seem the least article of doctrine or the least precept of government.

It is not necessary here to draw out in detail the whole doctrine concerning the essential conditions for acquiring and maintaining membership in the Catholic Church. It is enough to say that there are such conditions, and that they seem to be here signified by our Lord under the image of the “wedding garment.” There seems to be some apparent harshness in the exclusion of the guest before us, for it is imagined that his want of the wedding garment was no fault of his own, and the like. The supposition would probably be seen to be wrong by any one acquainted with the custom to which our Lord refers. But in the truth which is depicted by the parable, there is no question at all. The conditions on which the privileges of the Church are received, are open to all, and no one can forfeit these privileges except by presumptuous and contemptuous disobedience to her, such as is seen in the sin of heresy, which consists in departing from her faith, or in the sin of schism, which consists in rebellion against her law of unity and authority. In this matter, as in others, which are touched on by our Lord, especially in this last period of His teaching, He seems to have contented Himself with putting forth a great principle in a few

⁵ Rom. xi. 9, 10.

words. He leaves to His children, this warning of the "wedding garment." Later in the New Testament we find this doctrine expanded, like many others, by St. Paul and the other Apostles, whose teaching about external offences against the Church is founded upon the truth here set forth.

We may trace, perhaps, the very language of this parable in the passage of St. Jude in which he speaks so strongly of the heresies of his own day, where he seems to refer to the agapæ, or Christian feasts, and to the persons whom he denounces as defiling those feasts by their presence. "They are spots on your banquets, feasting together without fear," as this presumptuous guest is said by our Lord to have presented himself at the marriage supper. As was natural for the purpose of his Epistle, St. Jude speaks principally of heretics and rebels against Church authority. Heresy in those days was usually accompanied with immorality. "They defile the flesh, despise dominion, and blaspheme majesty. . . . These men blaspheme whatever things they have not, and what things soever they naturally have, like dumb beasts, in them are corrupted." He compares them to Cain, Balaam, and the companions of Core. "They are murmurers, full of complaints, walking according to their own desires, and their mouths speaking proud things." The Apostles had already warned Christians against them. "Be mindful, my dearly beloved, of the words which have been spoken before by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who told you that in the last time men should come mocking, walking according to their own desires in ungodliness. These are they who separate themselves,

sensual men, not having the Spirit."⁶ He warns the faithful against them, and bids them carefully distinguish between them, for all are not so extremely bad. Some are to be treated with indulgence, in order that it may win them back. St. Jude's Epistle is largely founded on passages in the Second Epistle of St. Peter, who speaks of the same class of offenders, who are also denounced in the Epistles of St. John and St. Paul. There can be no doubt that these Apostles are speaking of external offenders against Church authority, and not of men whose sins were solely internal.

But there are so many beautiful interpretations of this parable, that although the one just given seems on many grounds to be directly intended by our Lord, it may be well to add some considerations which may illustrate our meanings. If the Wedding Supper is considered as the Heavenly Banquet to which Christians hope to come after death, it is of course natural to ask what is meant by the wedding garment, which, as we are here taught, is so indispensable. On this point there may be numberless opinions. It is certain, however, that he who enters, or thinks of entering Heaven with one sin on his conscience unrepented, is thereby unfit for the presence of God. There are many things indeed which, as our faith teaches us, are essential qualifications for the enjoyment of that presence. "Without faith no man can please God. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved! But it would be contrary to Scripture and the Church to think that a man might be saved by faith if he is a breaker of the law in one single point."

⁶ St. Jude 12, 16, 17—19.

unless he has duly repented of the sin according to that law. Alas! in how many thousand ways may that law be violated, and so men make themselves guilty of violating the whole! The trials and temptations of men are various, and just as various are the ways in which they may present themselves at the Judgment Day without the wedding garment here spoken of—some for rejecting articles of the faith, some for breaking Unity, some for offences against the natural law, some for breaches of the commandments of the Church. The malice of mortal sins may be found wherever there is a precept knowingly violated. There are sins of thought, sins of word, sins of deed, sins of omission, sins occasioned in others, or the sins of others participated in. Any one of these various classes may cause the stain on the soul which presents it to the eye of the Judge without its wedding garment. Nay, even where there is no mortal sin unrepented, there may be venial sins, or sins unexpiated, and the like, which must be atoned for in Purgatory, and till the soul is entirely freed from all these it cannot have on its wedding garment.

Again, it may fairly be supposed, that the wedding garment would not always be the same, it might be of one kind and of one splendour in the case of the great courtiers or officials, and of another in that of private guests. But in all it would mean something that was quite in keeping with the occasion and the majesty of the Sovereign. It would be in all cases something festive, joyous, gay, representing the ineffable happiness of a soul at peace with God, and on this account we might also interpret it of Christian joyousness, which

cannot co-exist in the soul which has any hidden sin, any discontent, any want of charity, any lack of filial love towards God, any gnawing anxiety, or gloom, or secret aversion from its circumstances or its surroundings. Such a happy, joyous disposition in life is truly a grace by itself, and the result of a combination of graces and virtues, and the presence in the soul of any conscious fault, unretracted, would kill it. Such is notably the temper of the innocent, happy, pure souls who give themselves to the service of God in those austere religious orders which do so much for His glory and the good of the Church by silent lives of prayer and good works, and the opposite temper of gloom or constraint, so unlike the "wedding garment," is often a sign that there is some mischief working, as St. Teresa said she was more afraid of a melancholy nun than of a hundred devils.

Nor must we ever forget in our thoughts on this part of the parable how fond the writers of the New Testament are, and especially St. Paul, of the image of putting on our Lord, putting on the new man and putting off the old, and which is sometimes modified, as when we are told to put on the whole armour, or panoply, of God, and which is carried out by St. Paul in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, in his famous passage about the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in Heaven, with which we are to be "clothed upon" hereafter, "that that which is mortal may be swallowed up by life."⁷ The Apostles do not quote the actual words of our Lord in their Epistles, but their minds are full of the things He has spoken, and we can trace

in their language and their thoughts the influence of the sayings which they remembered. Perhaps the “wedding garment” may have been a favourite thought of theirs, for it would represent in a simple image the whole array of the graces in which Christians must be apparelled, as well as the perfect character of their Master, Whom they were to strive to imitate so perfectly that their lives might represent Him, and reproduce Him, as it were, before the eyes of those whom they were to teach.

The virtues that form the character of our Lord are so much linked one with the other, that it is not easy to imagine that one can exist perfectly in a soul without at least the rudiments and elements of others. And any one great and obstinate fault in the soul, consciously entertained and clung to, is enough to impair other virtues besides that one to which it is directly contrary. Still it is true that different men, from their character, their antecedents, and the circumstances and the position in which they find themselves, find it less easy to practise one virtue than another, and in this way there may come to be grave faults against one virtue, while at the same time the soul may be even conspicuous for some others. Sensuality is essentially cruel, yet sensual men are often capable of acts of kindness and generosity. Angry men may be mortified in various ways, and temperate men may be selfish in their demeanour to others. The one virtue which is called the “bond of perfection” by St. Paul, which seems to keep all the other virtues together, and to be inconsistent with any great fault, is charity. But by this must be meant the supernatural charity, the love of God and of man for His

sake, not mere humanity, kindness, generosity, sympathy for suffering, and the like. It must be the charity of which St. Augustine speaks when he says, "No man can have the charity of God, who does not love the unity of the Church," for as the same Saint says elsewhere, "Men can have everything else outside the pale of unity, but they cannot have salvation." This is often the test which distinguishes false virtue from true. Some men appear to have every kind of grace, till a sour cloud almost of malignity comes over them when they are reminded of the duty of unity, and the sin of schism. Certainly, there are thousands of schismatics who think themselves members of the one Church, the living, actual existence of which is as much an article of the Christian Creed as is the unity of God or the Divinity of our Lord, and there can be nothing sour or malignant about such souls while they remain in their ignorance. But when anything touches a half-hidden fault of which the soul is not unconscious, the angry discomfort which it feels is meant by the mercy of God to arouse it to a sense of its position, to make it look around, and nerve itself up to the sacrifice which charity may entail on it, and in many such souls the words of the Apostle come true, "If in anything ye be otherwise minded, this also will God reveal unto you."⁸

We may now turn from the consideration of the various ways in which this expression of our Lord about the wedding garment may be understood, to that of the gracious though severe manner in which the king is said to have dealt with his unworthy guest. "And the king went in to see the guests,

⁸ Philipp. iii. 15.

and he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment." The man was a "spot in the feast," as St. Jude speaks, conspicuous among the happy company by something incongruous and unseemly, as one who might go among ourselves into a wedding feast in robes of deepest mourning, or enter a great Court ceremonial in the clothes he may wear while ploughing in the fields or sweeping a chimney. This may be one of the reasons why our Lord speaks only of one, without meaning us to understand that there will be but one or few unworthy among those who are called to the banquet and obey the invitation. The doctrine which our Lord intends to convey is sufficiently and even more pointedly taught by the one instance, and, as some of the commentators tell us, this manner of setting forth the truth brings it home most closely to each soul, for it is seen that men are not called and admitted and tested in a multitude, but each single soul by itself.

Our Lord speaks as if the king used no sharp rebuke to the offender. "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?" The poor man had his opportunity given to him of making his excuse and explanation—if there were any to be made. But he is "judged out of his own mouth," for he has no reply to make to the question. The great truth which lies behind this is that there will be no question at all when the judgment of God is to be given. The light of the next world reveals all secrets, exposes all subterfuges and evasions, pulverizes all pretences, dissipates all clouds, unravels all webs. There is in the next world hatred of God as well as love, there is aversion from good as well as aversion from evil, misery as

well as happiness, despair as well as security. But there is no delusion—no single wicked soul among all God's enemies who has not seen that he has wilfully rejected his own happiness, and that the measure which God metes out to him is somewhat less than he deserves. A soul in the condition which is here represented to us parts with its self-delusions when it passes through death. The false theories about the Church, and about the obligation of faith, and the conditions of salvation, and the rights of conscience, and the like, which seemed full of a miserable comfort, have all vanished as “a dream when one awaketh” there. And so this soul might have said to itself a hundred things to excuse the fault, whatever it may have been, which is represented by the want of the wedding garment, but when it is there to place them before God, they are already gone.

All is over now. “But he was silent.” The majesty of the king may have been great, and the show of power and pomp in his attendants may have been impressive, and the presence of the multitude of guests among whom this man was the one exception found, may have been overpowering. But what circumstances of this kind can be compared to the truth of the parable, when God the Judge of all, in His Majesty, is the questioner, and the whole world of angels and men form the assembly before whom the poor sinner stands? “Then the king said to the waiters, Bind his hands and his feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness.” The punishment implies that the time is past when the sinner can help himself. He is bound hand and foot. He has no longer the power of

moving or working, because the time of grace is past when this rejection takes place, and no works done without grace are of any value spiritually. And he is cast into the darkness which reigns everywhere outside the kingdom of light, which is lit up by the presence of God, and of which our Lord is the light. The two-fold punishment which our Lord adds may be considered either as spoken by Him as a commentary on the parable or as belonging to the parable itself. The two may be used to express mourning, remorse, horror at the state in which men will find themselves, and above all despair and self-reproach. There is no express word about physical torments, for those belong to another part of the sentence. They correspond exactly to the evil works of which men have been guilty, not precisely to their sins of omission and neglect of God's blessed offers, and misuse or contempt of grace.

The clause added at the end, "For many are called, but few chosen," seems to be meant to teach us that the danger of forfeiting God's blessings lasts up to the very closing of the doors of the heavenly banquet. This guest is represented as one among many, one lost among many saved. This at least might be concluded from the language of the parable. We have already explained why, as it may be thought, only one is spoken of. But he relied upon his having been called, and had not taken the pains to make himself fit to be chosen. He had not understood the responsibilities and essential obligations of his calling. It was but just, therefore, that the sentence of exclusion should fall upon him, and our Lord means us to take to heart

the lesson of his case, and to tell us also that there will be many indeed, at the last day, who will have the same sentence as he.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS.

St. Matt. xxv. 1—13; *Story of the Gospels*, § 146.

AT the close of the great prophecy on the Mount of Olives, St. Matthew gives us the three last parables of our Blessed Lord. It seems as if he meant us to understand that they were delivered at the same time and to the same small knot of the disciples as the rest of the discourse which they follow. This may not be absolutely certain, on account of the method in which the first Evangelist frequently arranges his matter. But there can be no difficulty in supposing that it was so, and we may even think that none but the four disciples, at whose request the prophecy was given, were the hearers of these parables. In that case we may feel tolerably sure that our Lord did not mean them to be kept secret. They are obviously most useful to all, as enforcing with fresh earnestness many lessons which He had already given, and it is natural to think that they soon became the property of all the Christian community, especially of the early Church of Jerusalem. There is no injunction to the Apostles to keep the details of the prophecy, and the discourse which accompanied it, to themselves. Nor were they

restrained by any motives of prudence or reserve from communicating this teaching, which in so many ways sums up other instructions of the same kind, at the same time that it carries them further, and throws over them the light of a solemn prophetical pronouncement. They come in very naturally as the termination of the teaching of our Lord in this kind, and they seem to belong to the prophecy in another way also, which is not so clear as to the other parables, in being not only full of generally important teaching, but also as having reference in particular to the state of the world as the Day of Judgment draws near. All former similar teaching of our Lord implied that the state of the world, as to its preparation for the Judgment, was likely to be what was described. In this our Lord directly tells us that so it will be. If these parables had been delivered at another time, and placed here only because, for some reason or other, they had been passed over in their natural place, they would not suit the train of our Lord's thoughts at the very last, so well as they suit it in the place in which we now read them.

In this last discourse on the Mount of Olives our Lord seems to be exercising more especially and authoritatively than elsewhere the office of Prophet. He exercises it in a somewhat different manner from that which had been common to the prophets of the Old Testament. In the first place, as has been already remarked, He spoke with a clear and precise knowledge of the events which He predicted which was entirely His own. Certainly there was no lack of accuracy in the foreknowledge of the ancient prophets as to the matters which they were com-

missioned to foretell. But they were without that complete exhaustive knowledge of the whole plan of the future, as it lay before the mind of our Lord, from which the predictions of this great discourse flow. The prophets paint with perfect truth, each one portion or feature of a great picture. But our Lord had the whole picture before him, and all its several features or portions, as clearly as the whole, and their relations to the whole and to one another. Thus there is about the prophecy of which we have been speaking a comprehensiveness, as well as an exactness of detail, which belong to it alone among the Scriptural prophecies.

The predictions which it contains embrace the whole time from the epoch of its delivery to the end of the world, setting before us, in great and massive outlines, what our Lord wishes us to know concerning the future. It has also an eminently practical import all through, giving even the details which may have to be attended to in particular emergencies, as when He provides so carefully for the safety of the Christians at the time of their flight from Jerusalem, as well as the more general instructions as to watchfulness, which are meant for all times till the Day of Judgment comes. There is a tenderness and forethought about the whole which reveal the truth that it comes directly from the Heart of the Good Shepherd, although He has to speak of things which must have been most painful to that Sacred Heart, as the dissensions among Christians, their lukewarmness, and the falling away of so many. If we do not mistake the character of the parables of which we are now to speak, they also are marked by this same feature

of tenderness, although they set forth the dreadful truths of the rejection of many among His chosen servants, and the final doom of the wicked as well as the endless rewards which await the just at His hands. There is an air of calm and sweetness about the whole, and at the last our Lord speaks with the tone of majesty which naturally belongs to Him as the Judge of the whole race of mankind assembled before His throne, to receive each one his appointed doom from which there is no appeal.

The three great parables of which we are to speak are remarkable in this also that two of them are more or less repetitions of teachings of the same kind which have been given before, though they are here, as we shall see, modified by some touches which give them a character of novelty. It is as if our Lord had chosen these three special parts of His former teaching, to give them the character of predictions, and to give them, also, the impressiveness of being His last predictions. For the image of the "lamps burning," which is used in the first, that of the Ten Virgins, is taken from some former instructions as to watchfulness, and the Parable of the Talents is founded on the similar Parable of the Pounds which our Lord had delivered not many days before, just before His arrival at Jerusalem. The great "parable" which concludes the series is hardly a parable at all in the formal sense, and has all the more weight for us because it is so little of an ordinary parable. But it may be treated as such, and it is probably meant to be so treated by our Lord, inasmuch as although it belongs to the prophecy, as giving the conditions under which the sentences of the Last Judgment will be pro-

nounced by Him, the form in which the prediction is cast is clearly parabolical. That is, it seems that the few words which contain the reason of the sentence in each case, which is the practice or the neglect of corporal works of mercy, is meant to represent the principle of all good works and merits of whatever kind for which men will be rewarded, or all evil works of whatever kind for which they will be doomed to punishment. We shall see that there is a growth of the doctrine of the conditions of acceptance or rejection at the Last Day as the parables succeed in order, and our Lord probably meant them to form a continuous whole, and to be understood as such. We shall therefore take the three together, as containing the same doctrine of the conditions of salvation at the Day of Judgment.

The first of these great parables, as has been said, is that of the Ten Virgins. It is, like the others, cast in the form of a prediction. This form is not always used, and when it is used, we may understand that our Lord means to describe prophetically what shall be.

"Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who taking their lamps, went out to meet the bridegroom and the bride. And five of them were foolish, and five wise.¹ But the five foolish, having taken their lamps, did not take oil with them. But the wise took oil in their vessels with the lamps. And the bridegroom tarrying, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and

¹ The word used for "wise" means prudent, thoughtful, careful. The other word quite answers to our word "foolish."

trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out. The wise answered, saying, Lest perhaps there be not enough for us and for you, go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And whilst they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready, went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut. But at last came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answering, said, Amen I say to you, I know you not. Watch ye therefore, because you know not the hour."

We need not linger long over the details of the parable. Eastern marriages were celebrated at night, and there seem to have been two processions, one of the friends of the bridegroom, the "children of the bride-chamber," as they are called by our Lord, who accompanied the bridegroom to the house of the bride, the other of the girl friends of the bride, who awaited her arrival, or met her at some spot between her old home and her new home, and then entered in with their lamps lighted, to join in the banquet, which was the public part of the solemnity. That is enough to make the teaching of our Lord intelligible. For this purpose it is necessary that there should be uncertainty as to the moment at which the bride and bridegroom would arrive, that on the occasion of this wedding the time should have been long, that in consequence of the delay, the virgins, tired with waiting, should have fallen asleep, and that if their lamps had been burning before, the oil in them should have been exhausted. Then came the sudden cry at midnight, "Behold the bridegroom cometh," the call to go forth and the trimming the lamps, which revealed

the difference between the wise and the foolish virgins. It was their place now to receive the bride, and enter with her into the bridegroom's house. Their lamps required a supply of oil, with which the prudent had furnished themselves, the heedless had not. The lamps of the wise burn brightly, those of the heedless are either already extinguished, or are on the point of extinction.

The application made by the foolish to the prudent virgins, and the answer made by the prudent to the foolish, may be merely an accompanying circumstance in the picture, giving it more force and life. But it is natural to take it as representing to us the great vital truth, that though we are to love our neighbour as ourselves, we are not to love him more than ourselves and against the interests of our own souls. The order of charity and our duty to God require that nothing must be put before our own salvation, which is His affair as well as ours. We may also understand it as representing the truth that the oil in the lamp which is fit for the wedding to which our Lord invites us is a grace inherent in each individual soul by itself, and which cannot be supplied by the charity of others, however holy, although the offer of it may be won by their prayers. Not even the sacraments of the Church can save a soul that is averse from God by the want of the disposition necessary to salvation, to which therefore even the merits of our Lord cannot be applied. The rejection of such souls is very gently represented in the parable by the words of the bridegroom : "I know you not," that is, there is nothing in you that I can acknowledge as belonging to me. The remonstrance

which was made by the foolish virgins in the parable, again, has been thought by some to be a circumstance which is added to complete the picture. It corresponds, in any case, to similar features in other instructions of our Lord, such as that in the Sermon on the Mount, "Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name cast out devils, and done many wonderful works in Thy name? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from Me, all you that work iniquity." It is most probable that our Lord here speaks of the truth which will flash on the minds of all those who are rejected in the Day of Judgment, rather than of any spoken words in which that truth is expressed. Both passages express the awakening of the consciences, whether of the false teachers and heretics in the Sermon on the Mount, or of the virgins here, to the self-deception under which they have fallen, whether it has been that there will be time to prepare themselves for the Day of Judgment when it has once come, or that those who disobey our Lord as to the doctrines of the faith or the rule of Unity can save their souls by any amount of external works for His service. For on that great day, as it seems, all will be at once reduced to silence, and all will acknowledge the perfect justice of the final doom which will then be manifested to the whole world of angels and of men.

We do not forget here the numberless meanings which have been found by Christian writers for almost every single detail of this as of other parables. They are often very beautiful and convey great truths. But our object now is to find the one

great lesson which each of these parables conveys with regard to the final Judgment, so that the children of the Church may prepare themselves the better for it. It may not, therefore, be quite necessary to enquire what virtue may be represented by the oil which the wise virgins had and which the foolish virgins had not. It is true that without faith and without charity no soul can stand before our Lord. But it seems that in this parable our Lord is insisting on the need of simple prudence in the affairs of the soul, which would be acknowledged by any one as necessary in a matter of common life. The foolish virgins are like the man who did not take the pains to put on his "wedding garment," for the supper of the King's Son, and they are punished for their heedlessness as he was, and also for a certain want of respect due to the occasion, which was the cause of their heedlessness. No sensible person would run the risk of being unprovided with oil for a wedding procession, and if the occasion was one which called for a special display of devotion and affection, such a feeling would of itself be inconsistent with any neglect which might have been the effect of mere carelessness. Men know well enough what is required to be fit to meet our Lord, and their own conscience is enough in each case to tell them what is wanting, if they have been in the habit of examining it faithfully. In such cases, the conscience is likely to fear even when there is no real ground for fear, and to drive men to prayer and penance and the ordinary means of grace and reconciliation over and over again, and with greater and greater humility and fervour. The "prudent virgins" are likely enough

to fear that there may not be enough oil for themselves, after all their provisions.

It seems, therefore, as has been said, that this parable is a completion of one side of a picture of which our Lord had already drawn the other in His words about vigilance which have been put on record by St. Luke. “Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching. Amen I say to you, that He will gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and passing He will minister to them. And if He shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, blessed are those servants.” The circumstances of the delay of the bridegroom, in the parable before us, and of the consequent slumber of the virgins, whether prudent or foolish, may, as has been said, be only necessary to the main object of the parable, for the difference between the two classes of souls of which our Lord is speaking required that there should be some circumstance of the kind to bring it out. But some writers have justly remarked that there are intimations in our Lord’s language, here and elsewhere, which seem intended to prepare us for the truth that there was to be a much longer delay about the Day of Judgment than is commonly expected. We find the Apostles more than once correcting this error in their converts. In truth, the double aspect of the Day of Judgment almost necessitated the misconception, and it was not for Christians to know “the time and seasons, which the Father had put in His own power.” If Christians had been commonly taught that the Day of Judgment was far distant, they would have been inclined to trifle with the other truth, that it comes

practically to every man at the moment of his death.

We seem to be able to trace some of the effects of this teaching of our Lord in His discourse on the minds of His disciples, in the eager expectation of the Christians of the Apostolic times for the end of the world. It is little loss to them to think it very nigh, unless, as was the case sometimes, this led to some error against the faith, or to some carelessness in practice. The men of our time have fallen into the other and far more pernicious extreme, of thinking that the end of the world will never come, because it has been long delayed. Our Lord would have us be always ready, and it would be more likely that we should be so, if we had the thoughts of the early Christians on the subject of the end of the world rather than those which are in fashion now. The early Christians were right in their ideas of the shortness of their own time upon earth, of the swiftness and silence and hiddenness into which the close of each man's probation hurries on—after which, though the world last on for centuries and centuries, there is not a moment in all the course of time in which the false teacher can amend his creed or the foolish virgin furnish herself with oil.

We have said that it does not seem necessary to fix on any one virtue as intended by our Lord by the oil which was necessary for the virgins who were to meet the bridegroom. The variety of interpretation here is well known, and it is natural that it should be so. For there are many virtues which may be said in different ways to be necessary to the state of grace in which we must be if we are ready to meet our Lord. Faith, as has been said, is

necessary, and charity is necessary, and good works are necessary, and purity is necessary, and, under certain circumstances, even heroic virtue may be necessary, as in the case of fortitude in confession to the martyrs, or in other cases some other particular virtue. Certain texts may be quoted for one suggestion or for another, nor need the differences of interpretation frighten us, for there is some good and wholesome lesson to be learnt from all.

If we are to make a choice of one meaning, there is one thing which seems to fit into the use of the image of the lamp kept burning brightly, which has been urged by our Lord elsewhere, as where He says, "The light of the body is the eye, and that if thy eye be simple thy whole body will be lightsome, but if thy eye be evil thy whole body shall be darksome. If, therefore, the light that is in thee shall be darkness, how great will the darkness itself be!" A text like this seems to point to the office of conscience as the guide and light of the whole soul, given us by God as a reflection of the light of His own countenance, as the Psalmist says, *Signatum est super nos lumen vultus Tui, Domine*, and which, although it is not an infallible guide, because it may err, yet is placed in the position of an infallible guide to us by Him because, if we obey honestly its guidance, He will never hold us guilty, and in ordinary matters a simple and honest conscience is to be followed as His own law and speaks with His authority. We need not repeat here all that is said in Sacred Scripture about the joy of the conscience or the testimony of a good conscience, to which St. Paul appeals as his security against all the criticisms of men, but we may say surely that what-

ever special virtue may be necessary in particular cases, or even generally necessary, it is quite certain that where there is a good conscience the oil required by the parable cannot be wanting, and that where there is an evil conscience the lamp of the virgins is without its oil. In this interpretation also we see the fitness of the reply made by the wise virgins to their foolish sisters. For a good conscience is a thing that we cannot secure in others than ourselves, for each one must stand or fall by his own conscience, which he can part with to no one else. If a man take out his eye, and offer it to another, that other cannot see by it. Just so, no one can make the conscience of another do the part of his own.

If something of this kind be adopted as the interpretation of this part of the parable, we may see how true it is, and also how simple and easy is the condition which our Lord here requires for admission to that wedding supper of the Lamb which is the banquet on the eternal goods prepared for His own in Heaven. He says, in truth, nothing more than that all will be tried by their own conscience at the Last Day, and if we look at this statement in the light of our theology, it represents to us the general and universal truth that no one is to be lost who has followed his conscience, though, as the foolish virgins were shut out for a fault of omission in not providing themselves with oil, there may be many indeed who have failed to deal rightly with their conscience, by neglecting to inform themselves on matters which affect their salvation, and so have not fed their conscience, as those neglect their lamps who do not provide them with oil.

It may seem a truism to say that the one thing required is to keep our "conscience without offence towards God and man," and yet St. Paul would hardly have spoken in the way he did of this, as his particular daily exercise of virtue, if it had involved a mere truism.² And ordinarily speaking, if we should not rather say universally speaking, the sins of omission in persons who are lost may be more than the sins of commission, and these sins of omission are very largely indeed multiplied by the great omission of all, the cause of thousands of losses, the neglect to examine and care for the conscience. It is this which leads to the perpetration of thousands of sins of commission and sins of ignorance, and to the equally fatal neglect to set right sins which have been committed and which might be repaired by contrition and confession. So, perhaps, it may turn out at the Last Day that this neglect has been the cause of the ruin of innumerable souls, of a large proportion of the whole number of those to whom our Lord will have to say, "I know you not." Yet on the other hand this doctrine ought to be most consoling to the simple faithful children of the Church, both as to their own hopes of salvation and as to their hopes for others, especially those in good faith outside the visible Church. They are to be judged according to the light which has been within their reach, that is, by their own conscience, as well as the children of the Church them-

² See Acts xxiv. 16. He describes himself as "having hope in God which these also themselves look for, that there shall be a resurrection of the just and unjust. And herein do I endeavour to have always a conscience without offence towards God and towards man." He speaks of the care of his conscience, as a daily preparation for the Last Day, just as is implied in the parable before us.

selves. The great fear for all must be whether conscience has been carefully heeded, and the warning which our Lord seems to impress upon us is that of the Wise Man, "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issues out of it."³

We might have expected in a parable that speaks of those who are called to the wedding supper, and who are described as virgins to go forth with their lamps to meet the bridegroom and the bride, to hear of some conditions of salvation which involve great requirements and the most constant labour in their discharge. Yes, and the requirements of the faithful and those who belong in any especial way to our Lord are very great, and great indeed is the vigilance that is exacted of them because they have more light, and therefore, greater responsibility than others who are less blessed. But our Lord is speaking here as the Judge of all mankind, and He makes the conditions of the Judgment which is to be universal, such that they may apply to every one, whatever may have been his outward circumstances. And we may thus see in the parable an anticipation of the doctrine of St. Paul to the Romans, about the justice of the judgment of God, "Who will render to every man according to his works, to them indeed who, according to patience in good work, seek glory and honour and incorruption, eternal life, but to them that are contentious and obey not the truth, but give credit to iniquity, wrath and judgment, indignation, tribulation, and anguish upon every soul of man that worketh evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honour and peace to every one who worketh good, to the Jew first and

³ Prov. iv. 23.

also to the Greek. For there is no respect of persons with God. For whosoever have sinned without the law shall perish without the law, and whosoever have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law. For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature those things that are of the law, these not having the law are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness to them, and their thoughts, between themselves, accusing or else defending one another in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my Gospel.”⁴

In this great passage of the Apostle we have the truth that the final judgment of our Lord will be in accordance with the verdict of each one's conscience, that is, in the language of the parable before us according to the state of the lamp which each one of the virgins, both wise and foolish alike, has to present to the Bridegroom when He cometh, burning with sufficient oil. There is no respect of persons with God, and to those who meet Him at the Last Day unprepared He will say I know you not, whether they are as highly privileged as Christians or Catholics or religious persons, or as slenderly provided with external advantages as the poor heathen of whom St. Paul speaks in comparison with the Jews. Each child of Adam will be judged by his conscience, and for this reason it seems to be the truth which answers to the figure, when we say that conscience is the lamp and the oil.

⁴ Romans ii. 6, seq.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PARABLES OF THE TALENTS, AND THE SHEEP AND GOATS.

St. Matt. xxv. 14—46; *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 147, 148.

THE next of these three great parables is the well-known Parable of the Talents, which has already been put forth by our Lord in a former part of His teaching, and is here repeated with some notable variations and additions.

“For even as a man going into a far country called his servants and delivered to them his goods. And to one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one, to every one according to his proper ability, and immediately he took his journey. And he that had received the five talents went his way, and traded with the same, and gained other five. And in like manner he that had received the two, gained other two. But he that had received the one, going his way, digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money. But after a long time the lord of those servants came, and reckoned with them. And he that had received the five talents coming, brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst to me five talents, behold I have gained other five over and above. And his lord said to him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things, enter thou

into the joy of thy lord. And he also that had received the two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliverest two talents to me, behold I have gained other two. His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy lord. But he that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I know that thou art a hard man, thou reapest where thou hast not sown and gatherest where thou hast not strewed, and being afraid, I went and hid thy talent in the earth, behold here thou hast that which is thine. And his lord answering said to him, Wicked and slothful servant, thou knowest that I reap where I sow not and gather where I have not strewed, thou oughtest therefore to have committed my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received my own with usury. Take away therefore the talent from him and give it unto him that hath ten talents. For to every one that hath shall be given and he shall abound, but from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away. And the unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The variations which our Lord has introduced into this, which we may call the second version of the parable, are obvious at once. It is no longer a nobleman who goes into a far country to receive a kingdom, who is the lord of the servants. The circumstances, so familiar to the Jews, of the aspirants to the kingdom going to Rome to gain the favour of the Emperor, are not here repeated, nor the common incident of the citizens sending messengers to plead their cause, successfully or not, against the claimant to the throne, nor the return of the prince having received the kingdom from

"Cæsar," nor the revenge which after the confirmation of his claims he takes upon those who had thus intrigued against him. "As for those my enemies who would not have me to reign over them, bring them hither and kill them before me." These incidents in the former parable may have had their meaning, very applicable indeed to the opposition of the Jews to our Lord and to the chastisement which was to fall upon their nation in consequence. But now the great event which is before the mind is the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and the eternal rewards which are to be meted out to His faithful servants, while they are to be denied to those who have served Him unfaithfully. There is also the great difference that in the former parable the sum committed to his servants was equal in all cases, though the industry of one had multiplied it ten-fold, that of another had increased it five-fold, while another had no increase at all to show. In this second parable the talents are unequally distributed, yet it is said, "To every one according to his proper ability." And the rewards, which in the former case were in proportion to the industry of the servants, are here all equal, or rather, all of the same kind, "the entering into the joy of their Lord," Who in all cases promises that He will "set them over many things who have been faithful in a few things."

Thus in this parable our Lord speaks of the recompence of His servants as the same in general, being nothing less than a participation of His own joy, which is the highest kind of reward which any creature can desire or obtain, and which reminds us of the loving words of St. John about the future bliss

of the saints, where he says that we do not yet know what we shall be, but that “we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”¹ There may be many degrees in the blessedness of the sight of God in Heaven, which may correspond to the degrees of merit in the saints themselves, but it is the same sight of God which forms the immense and boundless felicity of all. And we are told that it is so arranged as to these rewards that no one desires to have more than he has, and in that sense each one is ineffably and immensely happy. And the happiness of each is so transcendent, so far surpassing any human conception, that if any one of us were admitted to see the full blessedness of any single saint, he would be unable to conceive anything that could exceed it.

Nothing, therefore, is said by our Lord in this parable as to the difference in degree of the reward of this or that saint. It is perhaps the case that the parable before us is meant by our Lord to convey most pointedly the lesson of warning, such as that which is contained in the incident of the slothful servant, which is fully repeated, and almost in the same words as those in which it is put in the former parable, and that so He passes quickly over the other side, so to say, of the story. The excuse made by the slothful servant is exactly repeated here, save that in the former parable he has received a smaller sum, a pound, which he is said to have wrapped up in a napkin, whereas here he buried his talent in the earth. The character which he imputes to his lord of being a hard man, is just the same in both parables, and it seems as if our Lord would have

¹ St. John iii. 2.

us understand that, notwithstanding His immense charity and gentleness, He does wish us to look upon His service as of the strictest obligation in a certain sense, and as a service of which the most exact account will be required of us, as when St. Paul said of himself, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel." And He repeats here that severe sentence which He had put in the former parable into the mouth of the lord, when he ordered the one pound of the slothful servant to be taken away from him and given to him who had gained ten in addition. "For to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound, but from him that hath not that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away." These words express a law in the Kingdom of God, according to which more and more grace, more and greater opportunities, are given to those who use well the grace they have and the opportunities they enjoy, while on the other hand, to use our grace or our opportunities slothfully, is the certain way to have the grace withdrawn and the opportunities forfeited. And our Lord ends the parable here with the final doom of the unfaithful servant, "And the unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The principles of the action of God as laid down in this parable are not difficult to grasp, though there are comparatively few who realize them fully. In the first place, this line is added to the picture, as drawn in the former Parable of the Ten Virgins, that we are not simply in the position towards God of the friends of the bride, as were those virgins, but we are servants with a certain task committed to us,

and with talents entrusted to us for the advancement of His glory, for which we shall have to give a very strict account indeed. It might be a great loss to the virgins not to be admitted to the supper; but that is no loss compared to the losses incurred by the unprofitable servant, who is punished instead of being simply shut out from a happy feast. Thus the relation in which we are to stand to God, according to which will be the issue of the Judgment Day, is put before us with far greater force and a terrible consequence if we are unfaithful. It is no longer our task merely to keep alight a lamp for the wedding. It is industry, labour, care, diligence, and responsibility, which is set before us. It is one thing to trim a lamp and feed it with oil, it is another to incur the toil and anxiety required of the servants whose master is a hard man, reaping where he had not sown, and gathering where he had not strewed. Happy indeed are those who understand the parable in all its fulness. The service of God is no hard service, and the fruits of that service are all reaped, not by Him, but by the servants who labour for Him. But they are in themselves so precious, so ineffable in the delights they convey, and the blessedness which they cause, that our Lord, Who truly understands them, and Who loves us too much to allow us to lose any part of them, uses this truth of our absolute bondage to God, in order to stimulate us to every possible exertion, that we may gain as much of them as the most laborious and persistent toil can put within our reach. So the virgins are put before us, if that is the meaning of that parable, as souls who take every pains and diligence to keep their conscience with intense care lest the slightest

stain should fall upon it, and whose reward is the crown of their purity and innocence, carefully tended, amidst a thousand dangers, and in that consists their service and their recompence. But there is something beyond innocence which is required of us, and that something is work for God in all its manifold variety. We are here, therefore, in a new atmosphere, and the question for our souls to ask themselves is, not whether we have kept our robe spotless, but whether we have laboured fruitfully and profitably for our Master. And there have been some saints of God who have been so much in love with every possible opportunity of labouring for Him, that they have been willing to remain a longer time below in the midst of dangers which might even threaten their own salvation, if they might be able thereby to add to the number of souls whom their labour has helped to add to the number of His Redeemed.

It is impossible to describe adequately the wide field which is thus opened, as it were, to the ambition of the Christian workers for our Lord, especially those who have the vocation to serve Him in the Christian ministry. We may repeat here what St. Paul says of himself, in the passage in which he speaks of the Apostles as having the judgment-seat of Christ present to them in their labours for His glory. "We must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the proper things of the body, according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil. Knowing therefore the fear of God, we use persuasion to men, for the charity of Christ presseth us, judging thus, that if One died for all, then were all dead, and Christ died

for all, that they also who live may not now live unto themselves, but unto Him Who died for them and rose again. But all things are of God, Who hath reconciled us to Himself in Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation. For God indeed was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing to them their sins, and He hath placed in us the word of reconciliation. For Christ therefore we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting by us. For Christ, we beseech you, be reconciled to God. Him that knew no sin, for us He hath made sin, that we might be made the justice of God in Him. And we helping exhort you, that you receive not the grace of God in vain.”² And if we turn to the passage which follows, which describes the painful but most blessed toil of the Apostles, we see how ready are those servants to work who understand the treasure which is committed to them in the Christian ministry, and the privilege which is theirs in being able to labour in it under the same conditions as St. Paul. It is well indeed that the reward of these servants is said to be the bliss of entering into the joy of their Lord. The reward of those that follow the wise virgins is indeed joy, represented by the happy Wedding Feast, for the characteristic grace of a well kept conscience is peace, joy, happiness, gladness. And yet to those who understand what it is to labour for God, and in labouring, suffer for Him, there will seem to be a still greater amount of joy even in this world, in the toil and suffering which their vocation brings with it. They will be inclined to tell us that such labour is more rewarded, even in its

possession of present joy, than the peaceful serenity of the virgin souls who keep their raiment unstained to the end.

Some writers consider that this second parable of our Lord, in the series on which we are engaged, is especially intended by Him as a warning and instruction to His priests and others who occupy any position of charge in His Kingdom, in the same way as the Parable of the Virgins is thought by the same commentators to be particularly addressed to those who serve Him in a life of contemplation. It may be true that such persons in both cases may most naturally and abundantly profit by the teaching of these parables respectively in each case, and yet it seems better to consider them as not confined to the classes of souls to which they may most especially be applied. We all have, in the first instance, to watch most vigilantly over our own interior, and this care is not to be superseded, even in the case of prelates, by that which they give to the charges which they fill in relation to the souls of others. Such men are bound to keep the lamp of their conscience bright and free from impurity, and well fed with oil, and they even more than others. For if they fail in this, all those over whom they are set must suffer, and a prelate who is not careful of his own soul will never be fit to give an account of the souls of others. It is more true to say that the lesson of the Parable of the Virgins must first be mastered by those who are in such positions as a preliminary step to the lesson of the Parable of the Talents.

And again, it must be obvious that if the Parable of the Talents is, as has been said, intended to set

before us the duty of diligently labouring in the work of our Master, there can be no better foundation for the diligence that is required of us than the careful self-discipline and purity of conscience which is recommended to us by the parable which has preceded it. Pure souls, who are strict with themselves and avoid any offence to God or man, may not be at once on fire with zeal, or may be timid in undertaking what may imperil their recollection. But when the inspiration of zeal for the glory of God sets them, as it were, ablaze, they are likely to be among the most devoted servants of our Lord, the most unwearied to work for His interests. The lesson of each of these parables may come home to a soul at different times and in different stages of its history and growth, and the earlier lessons are most likely to be needed before the latter are reached. The Parable of the Talents urges on all the duty of labouring in every way that is possible for them for the advancement of the interests of our Lord in the world.

The image used by our Lord in the parable is that of a person who has, as it were, a certain capital committed to him which he is bound to make the most of, and in the shortest time. So that it is a fault or a defect in him if he allows any part of that capital to lie idle, and if he does not invest it in the best goods and take it to the best markets. A traveller who has to reach a certain point by a certain time, under some heavy penalty or at the risk of his life if he fails, must consider himself bound not only to avoid straying from the right path, but also not to linger on the road lest he reach his point too late. A person whose safety

depends on his gaining the summit of a mountain, is not content with merely keeping the point he has to reach in view. He is careful not to lose a moment which might be spent in advancing up the height which he has to climb. Many long meditations may be made on these words in the former parable, *Negotiamini donec venio*. There are as many opportunities of traffic, says the devout Father Eusebius Nieremberg, as there are souls of our neighbours across whom we come.³ There are as many kinds of wares for us to deal with, as there are good works to which we may help our neighbour, evil works from which we may keep him, or practices of supererogation to which we may incite him. We have as many talents committed to us as there are means within our reach for helping him. We should examine ourselves, therefore, how far we have extended the range of our action with our neighbour in this way. Every one in this world is our neighbour as far as this duty goes, as the poor wounded man came within the charity of the Good Samaritan. It is a matter for careful thought how many our opportunities are, and that we neglect none of them, for we are sometimes led by taste to devote ourselves to some to the exclusion of others, or by diffidence and want of enterprise to leave alone opportunities which here might have opened to us large fields in which to labour. Weariness, indolence, a repugnance to persons with whom we have no sympathy, and to whole classes of whom we have never thought as objects of Christian zeal, may often keep us back.

The great Apostle himself, when he has spoken

³ *Doctr. Ascet.* I. ii. art. 2, c. xii.

of the different effects of the Apostolic work in different quarters and on different people, breaks out into the exclamation, "And for these things who is so sufficient?"⁴ And indeed it requires a mind and an energy like to his to meet all the calls of the work and to fail to understand none of the opportunities of his Master's service. But prayer and zeal and the love of souls may do much, and it seems that considerations of this kind are most naturally suggested to us by the second parable. There is also great reason to be thankful to our Lord for the loving gentleness with which He has clothed the lesson before us. In the first place, He lets us see that all those are not punished who labour less than others, but only those who will not labour when they can. Again, He puts the same words into the mouth of the lord in commending the less fruitful of the servants as in commending the more successful, "The joy of thy lord." He rejoices intensely over every soul that is won for the company of His redeemed by the labour of any one of the least of His servants. We hear nothing of the lord being thought a "hard man" by those who laboured well for him. The reproach is put into the mouth of the one who was slothful, who did not understand either the character of his master, or the joy which the work brought with it before the time came for rewarding it, or again, the richness and intense preciousness of the reward when it was conferred.

After the Parable of the Talents, our Lord proceeds at once to the last of this final series of such teachings. "*And when the Son of Man shall come in*

His Majesty," or, as the original has it, " His glory," " and all the angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the seat of His Majesty," or glory. " And all nations shall be gathered together before Him, and He shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats, and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say to them that shall be on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess," or inherit, " the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me to drink, I was a stranger and you took Me in, naked and you covered Me, sick and you visited Me, I was in prison and you came to Me. Then shall the just answer Him saying, Lord, when did we see Thee hungry and fed Thee, or thirsty and gave Thee drink? and when did we see Thee a stranger and took Thee in? naked and covered Thee? and when did we see Thee sick or in prison and came to Thee? And He answering, shall say to them, Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me. Then shall He say to them also that shall be on His left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me not to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me not to drink, I was a stranger and you took Me not in, naked and you covered Me not, sick and in prison and you visited Me not. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when did we see Thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick and in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? Then shall He answer them, saying, Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least ones, neither did you do it to Me. And

these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting."

It has already been said that this which is called the last of our Lord's parables, is far more of a prophecy than a parable in its fullest sense, although it possesses the distinguishing characteristic which belongs to that class of teaching. For the characteristic of a parable is that it conveys a truth, not directly, but by an image or similitude, and in this case the truth conveyed is conveyed by a similitude, inasmuch as the circumstances used to describe what is to happen at the Day of Judgment are, in more than one case, similitudes rather than actual facts. Our Lord will be there present in His Majesty and the whole number of the angels with Him, and all mankind will be gathered before Him to receive the sentence, each one for himself. But the address of the King to those on the right hand and to those on the left, is parabolical, the answer given by the just and by the wicked is parabolical, in the sense that, although the sentence will be conveyed to each soul, and each soul will wake up to the truth and justice of that sentence with some such surprise as is expressed in the words put into the mouths of the just and of the wicked respectively, the whole process will pass much more instantaneously, and the sentences and the thoughts of those who receive it will be much fuller and more extensive in range than the simple expressions in the parable. For it cannot be supposed that the just will be rewarded only for their works of corporal mercy, or the wicked condemned only for the neglect of those works, that the sufferings of the good will not be rewarded as well as the positive crimes of

the bad. There is no reward here specified for the practice of purity or of mortification, there is no punishment here mentioned for the thousand vices and crimes by which God is so continually offended. The sentence therefore which mentions one class alone of good deeds, is parabolical, not merely, it seems, as if one out of the whole number of virtues and one out of the whole range of vices had been selected for brevity's sake to stand for all the rest, but because the one that is selected on each side, so to say, represents that aspect of the Judgment which our Lord wishes especially to put forward here, and which embraces in a certain true sense the whole range of virtue or vice respectively. Let us try to explain what is meant by this.

The whole range of virtue, the keeping of the commandments of God, is summed up by our Lord when He says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." Here there are three loves mentioned as duties of man—the love of God, the love of his neighbour, and the love of himself. For we are bound by the strictest obligation to love ourselves, our own souls, our own salvation, in the right way, and this is a part of our duty to God our Creator and Redeemer and Sanctifier, and it is given by our Lord as the measure of our love for our neighbour, which again comes under the love of God, for it is for His sake, and as His children, that we are bound to love our neighbour. The three great parables which our Lord gives us now, are a summary of our whole duty and set it before us as a matter for which we shall have to account at the last day under this three-fold aspect. The Parable of the Virgins may

very well represent to us our responsibility for the care of our own souls, and the observance of our own conscience. Much has already been said on this point. The Parable of the Talents has been thought to set before us our duty with regard to the service of God, Who has committed to each one of us a certain amount of ability and opportunity, with regard to which we are responsible to Him. In that parable we are especially reminded of our duty to labour for His glory and service, and this duty is enforced by the features of the parable in which He sets Himself before us as a taskmaster, one who reaps where He has not sown and the like, or as He puts it in another passage, we are to look on and speak of ourselves, when we have done all that is commanded us as unprofitable servants, as having only done what we were under an obligation of duty to do.

In the last parable, if we so call it, our Lord seems to set before us the love of our neighbour as the third head of the examination to which we shall be subjected in the day of account. And He does this in the simplest way, speaking only of some of the lighter corporal works of mercy, which are of course very inferior in merit to the spiritual works of the same virtue, but which instance the obligation by which we are bound, first by the commandment which the Scripture tells us God "has given to every one concerning his neighbour,"⁵ and secondly by the rule made by our Lord that what is done to any one in this kind is done unto Him, and what is refused to any one in this kind is refused to Him. This obligation is expressly said by the Wise Man

5 Ecclus. xvii. 12.

in the place quoted to be universal, and thus it is this of which our Lord will speak on the Judgment Day to all men, even those who have lived only by the light of the law of nature. For, if they are to be excused for transgressions of other codes on account of ignorance, they cannot be excused from the guilt of violating that which is written in their hearts. And those who have no other law, or but little more, to guide them as to God's will, will be able by keeping this to merit before Him the forgiveness of a multitude of transgressions, as it is said, "Charity covereth the multitude of sins." And it may be that many will be forgiven their derelictions against other precepts for the sake of their observance of this, and will be led by their observance of this to do penance for other transgressions, and from their observance of this be brought into greater light, so as to become more aware of what God their Lord and Judge expects of them. It sometimes is found that where there are many other virtues all are lost and of no use for the want of this, whereas there is no fear of those who are perfect in this, failing in any other.

Viewed in this light, these three parables, placed at the close of our Lord's teaching, are wonderful in the witness they bear to the lovingness of His Sacred Heart. They are sentences given beforehand by the Judge of all, for they not only say what are the points on which the Judgment at the Last Day will turn, and a succession of most tender warnings, but they are prophecies of what will then be found to be the state of the souls which will stand before the Judge.

Thus our Lord seems to say to us, in these His

last words, the conclusion alike to His prophecies and to His instructions, that when He is to come again He will find many, He does not say how many, not ready for His coming,—many virgins, whose lamps will not be fed with oil,—many to whom He has entrusted work for His glory who will have hid their talent in the earth, and who will have nothing to show of gain, though what He has committed to them is in itself so fruitful and productive, —and not only so, but that the one virtue which has the power of cancelling shortcomings in those who have not kept their lamps bright, and in those who have not used their talents well, will by many not have been used as the remedy for these failures. For good works might have won for some who began like the foolish virgins, the grace of restoration, and charity might have made up for many negligences on the part of those who had begun by unfaithfulness and slothfulness in the service of the Master. But what shall make up in the case of those who have failed finally through the want of charity?

Our Lord closes the whole discourse by the words which declare the final and irrevocable doom both of the just and the unjust. "And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting." The just,—that is, those who have been careful like the prudent virgins, those who have been diligent like the profitable servant, those, last of all, who have practised the works of mercy to their neighbours, in all the wide sense of the word mercy, for the sake of Him, even though they have not at the moment had Him before their mind,—all these shall go into everlasting life. Surely, then,

there is no reason for faithful souls to fear the issue of the Day of Doom. Heaven and earth shall pass, but these words of His shall not pass. The Church, in her Sequence in the Mass of *Requiem*, turns our hearts to the special grounds of hope which our Lord does not mention, because they are founded on His own loving doings for us.

Quærens me, sedisti lassus;
Redemisti, crucem passus:
Tantus labor non sit cassus!

Thus He seems to choose to end His account of this great day with words of hope rather than of gloom. The last of the old Prophets ends his prophecy with words about God coming to smite the earth with a curse. Our Lord's last words breathe of everlasting life.

APPENDIX.

THE UNSPOKEN PARABLES OF OUR LORD.

IT has been said, in the explanation of the Parable of the Fig-tree (p. 212), that it may be well to consider it in connection with the very significant action of our Lord at the beginning of the Holy Week; when, in the presence of the Apostles, on His way to the Temple, He cursed the barren fig-tree, which was immediately withered down to the roots, and made the subject of observation by His companions on the following morning. It thus appears that the action of our Lord in cursing the fig-tree was, in truth, a parable. It seems also useful to connect both the parable and the miracle with the subsequent words of our Lord, in the last discourse on the Mount of Olives, when He spoke of the “parable” which was set before them in the blossoming of the fig-tree, at the approach of early summer. Thus His words may be understood as a prophecy of the future conversion of the Jews at the end of the world, one of the signs of which is to be that conversion.

These considerations suggest a beautiful subject for thought in what may be called the “Unspoken Parables” of our Blessed Lord. It may be taken as certain that His actions were always significant, and

in this sense His whole Life an “Unspoken Parable.” But there are certain of His miracles and other actions, which seem more especially to have this character, as if it had been His intention that they should be considered as teachings and prophecies in relation to particular truths, which He chose to impress or set forth in that way rather than in any other. Several very attractive lines of thought suggest themselves with regard to these actions of our Blessed Lord, which, if collected, might form a “Fourth Book” of these considerations on the Parables. We are, however, obliged for the present to leave this part of the work unattempted. It is remarkable that almost all these parables—so to call them—are addressed more particularly to the Apostles, and are prophecies of what is to be, or to happen in the Church. Some of these are here selected for mention, though it is quite possible that a few more might be added.

The first “parable” of this kind may be found in the miraculous draught of fishes recorded by St. Luke,¹ which was vouchsafed to the disciples after they had “laboured all night and caught nothing,” and when St. Peter had declared to our Lord that “at His word he would let down the net.” The fishing seems to have been considered figurative of the success promised by our Lord directly afterwards, when our Lord said to St. Peter, “Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt be taking men.” After the fishing was over, “when they had brought their ships to land, leaving all things they followed Him.”

The second of these parables may be found in

¹ St. Luke v. 1—11.

another miracle on the lake, when our Lord was asleep in the boat in a great storm, and the disciples woke Him, on which He rebuked them for their want of faith, and then bade the storm cease.²

The third "Unspoken Parable" is our Lord's walking on the waters on which the Apostles were toiling in the night. He came to them on the water.³ They were frightened, and, on His speaking to them, St. Peter asked to be told to come to Him, and when ordered to do thus by our Lord, he walked some little way and then began to sink. On this our Lord took him by the hand and saved him. When they went up into the ship, "they reached the land presently," that is, immediately.

Another incident which may be considered as having this character is the payment of the Temple tax by our Blessed Lord for Himself and St. Peter.⁴ The incident contains two remarkable features. One of these is that our Lord pays the tax for St. Peter only, as if in him He wished to imply that the whole body of His disciples was contained. The other feature is that our Lord must have been very well able to find some charitable friend to pay the money for him, or He might have taken it from the common fund of which Judas had charge. But He chose rather to have recourse to the Providence of His Father, and it may be thought that a significant lesson is here conveyed.

Another incident of the same parabolic kind is what is recorded of our Lord when the disciples had been disputing who was the greatest, and He,

² St. Matt. viii. 24—27; St. Mark iv. 36—40; St. Luke viii. 22—30.

³ St. Matt. xiv. 22—36; St. Mark vi. 45—56; St. John vi. 14—24.

⁴ St. Matt. xvii. 23—26.

"calling unto Him a little child, set him in the midst of them."⁵ A long instruction follows in the Gospel history.

The next of these "parables" to be mentioned is the cursing of the unfruitful fig-tree, of which something has already been said. Two more remain. The first of these is the action of our Lord in washing the feet of the Apostles at the Last Supper, before the institution of the Blessed Eucharist. It appears an action of great humiliation, especially when we remember that among those whose feet our Lord then washed was the hitherto unrevealed traitor, Judas. It was also an act of great charity, even if we leave out of consideration the great spiritual blessings which it was meant, according to the interpretation of some of the Fathers, to shadow forth. For there is an ancient and venerable tradition which attaches to this action a kind of sacramental import, alluded to by our Lord's words to St. Peter, which made him ask to have his hands and his head washed as well as his feet. Some Fathers say that this significant ceremony was meant to be understood in the Church of that cleansing from lighter sins by acts of penance, contrition, and other virtues, which should be constantly practised by us before we receive the Blessed Sacrament in Holy Communion.⁶

Several great writers have seen a meaning of the same kind in the last miracle recorded of our Lord, the second miraculous fishing in the Lake of Gennesareth, after the Resurrection, which is related in full, with the subsequent words of our Lord and

⁵ St. Matt. xviii. 1, 2; St. Mark ix. 35; St. Luke ix. 17.

⁶ St. John xiii. 1—20.

the Apostles, by St. John in his last chapter. But these need not be drawn out at length now.⁷ This miracle should be contrasted with the first of the same kind at the outset of the history of the Ministry, and contemplation may feed itself long upon the respective incidents of each without exhausting them.

⁷ St. John xxi. 1—24.

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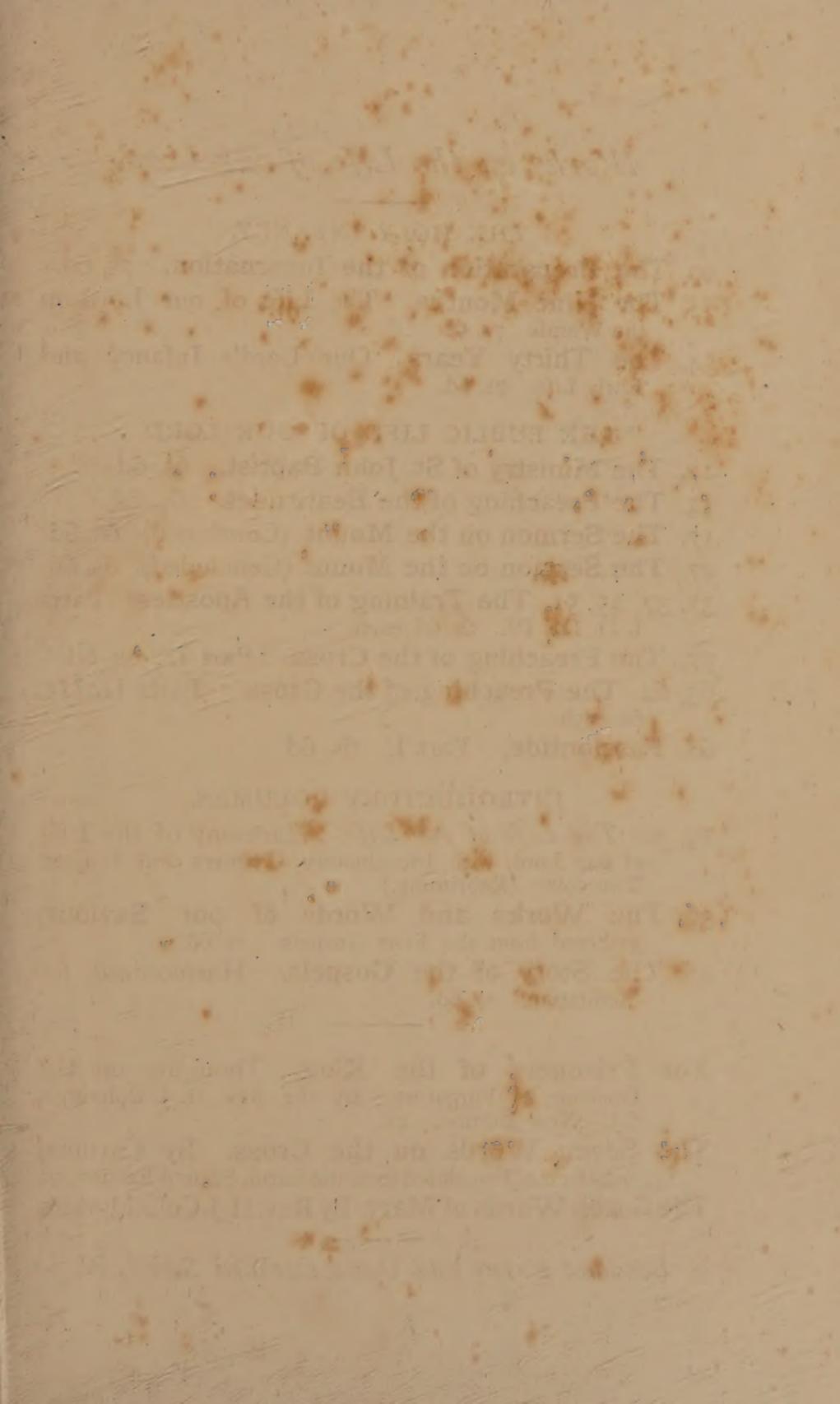
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